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**The Reproduction of Violence in the Works of Patrick
Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant**

Catriona J. Cunningham

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University of Glasgow

Department of French

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Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	3
The Figure of the Writer	13
Chapter 1 – The Origins of Violence	33
Part 1: The Original Violence	34
Part 2: A Pattern of Violence	52
Part 3: Unhealed Wounds: The ‘Enracinement’ of Violence	61
Chapter 2– Sterility and the Repetition of Violence	90
Part 1: The Colonial Relationship	92
Part 2: Sexual Violence	114
Part 3: The Propagation of Violence	135
Chapter 3 – Fertility and Escape from Violence: the <i>Jardin Créole</i>	157
Part 1: The Garden as Anti-Plantation	159
Part 2: The Garden as Symbol	173
Chapter 4 – Confronting Violence: the Sea and the Mother Figure	200
Part 1: Female Characters as Allegorical	209
Part 2: The Sexual and Fertile Aspect of the Sea	225
Chapter 5 – Writing, Creativity and Violence	243
Part 1: Silencing and Sterilisation	245
Part 2: Creating a Family – the Fertilisation of the <i>conteur</i>	258
Part 3: Natural versus Narrative Reproduction	269
Conclusion	282
Bibliography	302

Abstract

This thesis compares the reproduction of violence in the fictional writings of two contemporary Martinican authors, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant. While existing scholarship provides significant examinations of both authors individually, this study builds on these foundations to carry out the first single extensive comparison of Chamoiseau and Confiant's novels. Chamoiseau and Confiant's literary and political movement of *créolité* has been the basis of much critical attention in recent years but the theme of the representation of violence in their novels remains relatively unexplored. This thesis explores how – and even whether – fiction can be a way of coming to terms with the brutal violence of their past. This study therefore examines – through close textual analysis – the *literary strategies* employed by the authors in their representation of the origins of the Antilles in order to address the painful, difficult issues arising out of these origins.

In its comparative approach to the authors and in its focus on the reproduction of violence, this study makes two original contributions to the study of Antillean literature. In the Introduction, I outline the tensions surrounding the process of writing in the Antilles. Within this specific historical context the figure of the writer – real or imaginary – becomes a complex and difficult one, as it is clear that the violence of the colonial past continues to affect the authors and their writing. In the first chapter, I therefore return to those same brutal origins of the Antilles, examining how they are constructed in the authors' fiction. Chamoiseau

and Confiant imply that the violence of the past acts as a mechanism of oppression. Drawing on colonial theory, the next chapter explores closely how this mechanism is represented in the authors' fictional work as a repetition of the original violence and one that continues to structure Antillean society, and from which no escape seems possible. In chapters three and four, I turn respectively to two more fertile and natural symbols represented by the authors as possible ways out of this cycle of violence: the *jardin créole* where the past is elided; and the sea, in which the past is confronted, but with fearful consequences for the male writer. Using anthropological and feminist theory, I investigate whether either of these symbols can offer a permanent way of coming to terms with the horrors of Antillean history. In the final chapter and in the Conclusion, focus returns to the process of writing itself to examine whether writing is the only possible means through which Chamoiseau and Confiant can overcome the sterilising voices of their past.

Introduction

This thesis focuses on two contemporary Martinican authors, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant and how they address the violence of their colonial past through their fictional work. Both authors are also involved in the promotion of the literary and cultural movement of *créolité*. This movement is outlined in *Eloge de la créolité* (which Chamoiseau and Confiant co-authored with the Martinican linguist Jean Bernabé),¹ a text that sets out the literary and theoretical manifesto of the creolist authors.² The publication of *Eloge de la créolité* positions the creolist authors within a series of ‘theoretical’ frameworks, which explore the question of Martinican identity emerging from the traumas of the colonial past. These questions began with Césaire and the *Négritude* movement in the 1930s, and continue with Glissant’s more geopolitical writings which began with the term of *Antillanité*. The male creolist authors have therefore already established themselves as the latest ‘generation’ of Martinican theorists and writers of fiction who are keen to outline a Creole cultural history that is different to that of metropolitan France.³ It is important here to emphasise the authors’ masculinity, which has been considered by certain critics to define their fictional

¹ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau & Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993). For the remainder of this thesis, this text will appear as *EC*.

² I will refer to Chamoiseau and Confiant throughout as creolist authors because of their movement of *créolité*.

³ Distinguished Antillean female authors do exist (Maryse Condé, Gisèle Pineau) but they prefer to distance themselves from the definition of ‘créolité’ proposed by their male counterparts as the following quotation by Condé indicates: ‘Il ne faut pas que la créolité empêche à chacun d’avoir le rapport qu’il veut avec la réalité antillaise’, in Françoise Pfaff, *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé* (Paris: Karthala, 1993), p. 165.

work.⁴ Throughout the course of the thesis, I will return to the perceived masculinity of the creolist authors' writing as I examine the representation of the feminine as an important symbol of, and against, violence.

Aside from their theoretical output, the authors' fictional work has gained acclaim in metropolitan France and both authors have won major literary prizes: Chamoiseau won the Prix Goncourt for *Texaco* and Confiant the Prix Antigone for his first novel in French, *Le Nègre et l'amiral* as well as the Prix Novembre for *Eau de café*.⁵ Gaining literary recognition from metropolitan France has raised the profile of both authors considerably in their native island and has also attracted an increasing amount of interest in international academic circles.⁶

Born in the 1950s, both authors belong to the first generation growing up in Martinique after departmentalisation in 1946. I am not interested, here, in the fine details of Martinican history. Scholars such as Oruno Lara have already offered significant analysis of the island's complex and tumultuous past.⁷ What concerns me more is the cultural legacy of this history which, as their childhood *révélés* indicate, has left the authors torn between two cultures and languages: their

⁴ See in particular, A. James Arnold, 'The Gendering of Créolité: The Erotics of colonialism', in *Penser la créolité*, eds. Maryse Condé & Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris: Karthala, 1995), pp. 21-40, whose chapter will be closely examined in Chapters 2 & 5. Further references to this chapter are given after quotations in the text.

⁵ *Texaco* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992); *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1988). *Eau de Café* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1991). Future quotations from these novels will be referenced respectively as *T*, *NA* and *EdC*.

⁶ More recently, scholars working within the area of Transatlantic Studies have increasingly focused on the Caribbean in general as a model for the complex cultural hybridities that define the space.

⁷ Oruno D. Lara, *De l'oubli à l'histoire: espaces et identités caraïbes: Guadeloupe, Guyane, Haïti, Martinique*, (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998).

native Creole and the French medium of their education.⁸ This cultural legacy is reflected in *créolité*, which attempts to merge the authors' political and literary aims of promoting a Creole identity that offers an Antillean version of history, which, in turn, allows each individual to embrace the plurality of her/his origins and identity. It could be said that all Antillean writers are responding to a search for a formation of identity, which is undoubtedly dominated by the history and legacy of slavery and colonisation. This thesis, then, will explore the literary strategies of these two authors in their attempt to respond to, and even come to terms with, the violence and trauma of the past. Violence in this context deals specifically with the rupture with the homeland, the shock of displacement, the brutality of the slave trade and the plantation system all of which has resulted in the erosion of individual identity.

This violence then, which is both physical and psychological, can be traced back to colonialism. The Tunisian critic Albert Memmi has convincingly portrayed the internalisation in the colonised psyche of a rigid, oppressive system that structures any colonial country.⁹ His analysis of the condition of both coloniser and colonised outline the different experiences of each and, for the purposes of this thesis provide an important critical tool for analysing the relationship between Antillean writers and metropolitan France. Beginning with the coloniser, Memmi slowly traces his behaviour from the initial arrival in the

⁸ Both authors have published *récits d'enfance* that give an account of their childhoods, and in particular the alienating and also stimulating experience of learning French at school having been brought up in Creole: Raphaël Confiant, *Ravines du devant-jour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) and Patrick Chamoiseau, *Une enfance créole II: Chemin-d'école* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994). Future quotations from these editions will be referenced respectively as *RdJ* and *EC II*

⁹ Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, portrait du colonisateur*, preface by Jean-Paul Sartre (Paris: Gallimard, 1985). Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

colony and examines with seeming innocence how the ‘colonisateur de bonne volonté’ (p. 43) is able to survive in such a privileged system. Memmi then demonstrates that the only options available in refusing colonialism are to leave or to remain and attempt to change the situation. However, as Memmi argues, ‘refuser la colonisation est une chose, adopter le colonisé et s’en faire adopter en semblent d’autres, qui sont loin d’être liées’ (p. 47). In other words, it is impossible for the coloniser to completely assimilate himself into the colonial system without also becoming one of the victims. The coloniser can see he does not belong with the colonised, in historical, cultural and linguistic terms. Therefore, unless the coloniser leaves or is ‘un héros moral’ (p. 47), he is destined to become part of the system. The problem with this latter situation, Memmi argues, is that the coloniser is then in a position of ‘ambiguïté’ (p. 73) where he is in a privileged role in a place to which he does not belong. This suggests that there is a need for legitimacy, which explains the coloniser’s need for ‘auto-absolution’ (p. 94): the colonised has to be despised for the coloniser to be able to justify his position.

The bond that connects the coloniser to the colonised is explained by Memmi in the following lines: ‘le mécanisme est quasi fatal: *la situation coloniale fabrique des colonialistes, comme elle fabrique des colonisés*’ (p. 77) and indeed, the colonised has been negated to such an extent that ‘jamais il n’est considéré positivement’ (p. 103). The end result is that the colonised is completely dependent on the coloniser not only for his economic survival, but also for his very sense of self. Such is the extent of the self-negation of the

colonised, the coloniser's mythical 'portrait' is the only image through which the former can perceive himself. Memmi's depiction of a system that traps both colonised and the coloniser in a relationship from which there is no escape also sets up an important psychological framework within which we can examine how the creolist authors can use their work to transcend this damaging, seemingly endless violence.

As will be demonstrated in this thesis, the 'mécanisme' of colonialism described by Memmi continues to be portrayed in the works of the creolist authors even though the islands became 'départements d'outre-mer' in 1946. Much of the tension in the Antilles arises from the fact that they are still culturally colonised. This is a point that is made strongly by Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism*, where he reminds the reader that '[i]mperialism did not end, did not suddenly become 'past' once decolonization had set in motion the dismantling of the classical empires'.¹⁰ For Said, narratives are the medium through which many of the tensions of imperialism are played out: '[t]he power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them' (Said, p. xiii) and it is indeed an examination of the creolist authors' fictional work that will enable us to examine the complex relationship each author has to writing and thus to the complex imperialist mechanism that structures their society. By examining the way in which novels depict the relationship between culture and empire, Said demonstrates how everything is

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1995), p. 341. Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

seen from a Western perspective: ‘in this view, the outlying regions of the world have no life, history or culture to speak of, no independence worth representing without the West’ (Said, p. xxi). Said’s comments remind us of the cultural domination facing Chamoiseau and Confiant as they attempt to assert their own cultural and literary identity as separate from that of metropolitan France.

Moreover, as Richard Burton in *La Famille coloniale – la Martinique et la mère patrie 1789-1992* demonstrates,¹¹ the form of cultural imperialism described by Said continues in Martinique by an ongoing ‘infantilisation’ of Martinican people by the descendants of the white settlers, the *békés*. Burton analyses the child-parent metaphor when describing the relationship between metropolitan France and the Antilles. This relationship is rendered even more tense and difficult because of continuing racism which leads to what Fanon has identified as an objectification of the colonised subject.¹² Fanon explores the mechanics of this form of oppression in detail, identifying the ‘raciste’ (p. 75) as the one directly responsible for the inferiority of the colonised individual. His language, in proclaiming this fact, ‘Ayons le courage de le dire: *c’est le raciste qui crée l’infériorisé*’ (p. 75), implies the level of denial existing within colonial situation at that time. It also indicates the degree to which the colonised individual is assimilated into this system, and so is no longer even able to identify this oppression. Throughout *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Fanon shows that, in fact, the black man can only define himself in relation to the white man, ‘[c]ar le

¹¹ Richard D. Burton, *La Famille coloniale: la Martinique et la mère patrie 1789-1992* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994).

¹² Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991). Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

Noir n'a plus à être noir, mais à l'être en face du blanc' (p. 88).¹³ The notion that the black man's sense of self comes from the white other is central to the opening chapters of this thesis, as we examine how the creolist authors attempt to fight against this insidious, debilitating form of violence.

As shall be seen in the course of this thesis, colonial writers attempt to break free from this by transforming the colonised into a 'subject' of history, thus overcoming the cultural imperialism that, as Said demonstrates, continues to exist in societies said to have moved beyond (as in post) colonialism.¹⁴ The collective writings of Memmi, Said and Fanon all suggest that the colonised-coloniser relationship is a violent yet ambiguous one, in which each is bound to the other through the colonial experience. Moreover, the tensions that such a relationship creates are not restricted to the period of colonisation. Instead, the colonised is portrayed as an individual whose very identity has been taken away and re-defined by the coloniser and the consequences of this are not restricted to any particular historical era.

Perhaps as a result of this earlier work, the situation in the Antilles is one that has already been widely explored by critics, especially in the last ten years.¹⁵

¹³ Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952). Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁴ Needless to say, the significance of the 'post' in postcolonialism has been a subject of much debate in recent years. See for example, Ajaz Ahmad, ' "Postcolonialism": What's in a Name?', in *Late Imperial Culture*, eds. Roman de Campo *et al* (New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 11-32; Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Postcolonialism" ', *Social Text*, 31, 2 (1992), 984-98; Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial" ', *Social Text*, 31, 2 (1992), 99-113.

¹⁵ Indeed the entire field of postcolonial studies which, since its beginnings, has been largely based in the Anglo-Saxon academy, and dominated by Anglophone critics, has only recently begun to acknowledge its debt to the francophone world, and appreciate the dynamic viewed from

Recent years have seen many works which make a valuable contribution to this academic area of study and which either explicitly explore the theoretical contribution of Antillean thinking to postcolonial theory (Celia Britton) or situate and analyse Antillean cultural production within a postcolonial framework (Celia Britton) or explore recurrent thematic issues in the literature produced (Mary Gallagher, Dominique Chancé, Sam Haigh, Maeve McCusker, Lorna Milne). While many of these studies concentrate on Antillean literature, there is also a particular focus on the question of identity. Celia Britton's study of Edouard Glissant's writing is, in this respect, particularly instructive and has informed certain aspects of my approach to Chamoiseau and Confiant. Although this thesis will not focus on Glissant – to do so would stretch the parameters of my study unnecessarily – Britton's underlining of the centrality of the language question to the author's work, and her identification of language as 'a strategy of resistance',¹⁶ can be equally applied to Chamoiseau and Confiant, both of whom were of course hugely influenced by the older writer. For all three authors, language becomes an important strategy to be used, particularly for a writer fighting against the cultural and linguistic domination of metropolitan France. The notion of language as a weapon is one that appears in *Eloge*, as demonstrated below, and reinforces the importance of the writer in Antillean society. Yet, Britton also highlights the ambiguous role of the French language in particular. Although it is a language 'of desire and identification' (Britton, p. 83), Britton

the other side, in particular Black Antillean theorists such as Fanon, an opportunity to appreciate the dynamic from the other side.

¹⁶ Celia M. Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Post-Colonial Theory – Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 181.

uses Glissant's work to show how the Martinican individual loses his/her subjectivity through the experience of language – the lack of language 'becomes equated with not having a fully realized self' (Britton, p. 180). This link between the French language and the loss of Martinican identity is central to our examination of the creolist authors' writing, which attempts to compensate for this same loss.

Mary Gallagher's important study, *Soundings in French Caribbean Writing since the 1950s: The Shock of Space and Time*, is primarily concerned with drawing on a variety of textual and theoretical threads and pulling the many different strands of space and time in Antillean writing together.¹⁷ For Gallagher, the entire space of the French Caribbean is in flux making it 'unthinkable, then, as a static, demarcated area. Part of the Atlantic continuum, it is first and foremost fluid and, as such, comprises currents, flows, passage, and displacement' (*Soundings in French Caribbean Writing*, p. 2). The emphasis here on fluidity and on continuous movement implies that the inherent geography of the islands (being surrounded by water) somehow defines the fluidity of identity and subsequently the writing produced in the French Caribbean. This is an important metaphor for the purposes of this thesis. The relationship between the physical space of the islands and the way in which it shapes its inhabitants is one that becomes increasingly important for the later chapters of my study, as the

¹⁷ Mary Gallagher, *Soundings in French Caribbean Writing since the 1950s: The Shock of Space and Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Further references to this study are given after quotations in the text.

creolist authors turn to their local environment to confront the violence of the past.

In her examination of *créolité*, Gallagher summarises the vision of Creole identity put forward by its authors:

[It] is presented [...] as the endorsement of an accessible present, emerging from a still tangible past; the past is to be rehabilitated, the present celebrated. Thus the *créolité* movement is a pragmatic programme, rather than the promise or prophecy of what can be imagined of the past or of the future. It is credited, nonetheless, with a residual prophetic status, in that its postmodern model of emergent identity is held to prefigure the future of all culture. (*Soundings in French Caribbean Writing*, p. 37).

Gallagher's references to the rather practical nature of *créolité* suggest that its aims and objectives are grounded in a reality that does not have grand, mythological ideals. What is important for the purposes of this thesis is the close link she establishes between the past and the present. The representations of the past are central to our examination of the strategies employed by the creolist authors in their fictional work in order to come to terms with the brutality of the past. Gallagher states that the past is still 'tangible', making it clear that the present continues to be closely connected to this past. Moreover, the use of the word 'rehabilitate' to describe how the creolist authors treat the past is significant, hinting that it will be a painful process but that it is nevertheless

necessary if the present is to be ‘celebrated’. Above all, Gallagher points to the identity that will emerge from this process of restoration, and the creolists’ belief that the Creole identity is one that will define the future identity of mankind.

The Figure of the Writer

As I have mentioned, this thesis will draw on these previous studies as a means of probing the fictional work of two ‘products’ of this complex society, comparing and contrasting how they deal with the trauma of the past and in a sense, how they define themselves as writers within a society that emerges from such problematic origins. The opening pages of *Eloge* take the reader into the heart of these problems by declaring that: ‘[n]i Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Créoles’ (EC, p, 13). What is interesting here is that the authors – Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant – define themselves *by what they are not*, drawing attention to the flexibility of their identity in particular. It appears that they refuse to be categorised as uniquely ‘African’, ‘European’ or ‘Asian’. This definition of what it means to be ‘Creole’ is then described as a ‘témoignage’ (EC, p. 13) that comes from ‘l’expérience stérile que nous avons connue avant de nous attacher à réenclencher notre potentiel créatif, et de mettre en branle l’expression de ce que nous sommes’ (EC, p. 13). It would appear that *créolité* is an attempt to overthrow the burden of having to correspond to one category and instead is a search for self-expression. This is why *créolité* is so concerned with the question of language. While the authors of *Eloge* do not insist

that the Creole language is the only medium in which Creoles can express themselves, they see in the Creole language ‘le véhicule original de notre moi profond, de notre inconscient collectif, de notre génie populaire’ (EC, p. 43). The importance of Creole to the authors’ definition of their identity is clear in this statement, a definition that they claim is ‘collective’, as if they are speaking on behalf of all Antilleans. This impression makes the ‘expérience stérile’ mentioned above seem even more significant, for it implies that the creolist authors feel completely ‘impuissant’, as if their very manhood has been denied. Above all, the word ‘stérile’ suggests that there is no clear end in sight to this situation, as if there is no hope of an alternative future. One of the reasons for this sense of sterility stems from the fact that ‘[n]otre richesse bilingue refusée se maintient en douleur diglossique’ (EC, p. 25), a quotation that refers to the sense that the French language was imposed upon them. It is this ‘painful’ diglossia that has threatened to leave them powerless within the metropolitan cultural imperialism mentioned above. In order to break the sterilising effect of this domination, the authors intend to ‘inseminate’ the orality of their native Creole language into the written French word (‘Nous pourrions [...] procéder à l’insémination de la parole créole dans l’écrit neuf’ [EC, p. 36]). It is this ‘artificial insemination’, to borrow Chancé’s term,¹⁸ that will lead to the creation of a new literature, enabling the authors to get in touch with their ‘creative potential’ and also assert their creoleness.

¹⁸ Dominique Chancé refers to this process of inserting the oral Creole word into the written French one as ‘l’insemination artificielle’ in *L’Auteur en souffrance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), p. 69. We will explore the implications of this notion in Chapter 5. Further references to this study are given after quotations in the text.

However, towards the end of *Eloge*, the authors imply that they have succeeded in overcoming the sterilising domination outlined above. The tone and language of the manifesto becomes increasingly belligerent as *Eloge* progresses until the authors finally declare:

Nous l'avons conquise, cette langue française. Si le créole est notre langue légitime, la langue française (provenant de la classe blanche créole) fut tour à tour (ou en même temps) octroyée et capturée, légitimée et adoptée [...] Bref, nous l'avons habitée. En nous elle fut vivante. En elle, nous avons bâti notre langage (EC, p. 46).

There is a sense of triumph here – particularly evident in the italicised phrases – that imply a linguistic battle is at play. This sort of metaphor is surprising in its colonialist attitude, leaving the reader unsure whether this is a deliberate, ironic parody of the colonial project or whether the authors themselves are simply locked into a pattern of violent behaviour. The authors are also extremely keen to emphasise the global nature of their movement and in keeping their definition of ‘Creole’ and ‘créolité’ universal, i.e. not aligned to any specific geographical space.

It is perhaps inevitable that in writing a manifesto that tries to match a powerful poetic voice with strong political views, the authors’ outline of *créolité* raises a number of problems, some of which have been identified by critics.¹⁹

¹⁹ A number of these criticisms are addressed by Maeve McCusker in chapter entitled ‘This Creole Culture Miraculously Forged: The Contributions of *créolité*’, in *Francophone Postcolonial*

Gallagher, in particular, highlights the teleological nature of *créolité* and suggests that such a programmatic approach ‘would seem more likely to produce formulaic rather than creative results’ (*Soundings in French Caribbean Writing*, p. 39), which seems to be the opposite of the authors’ intentions in creating an Antillean literature. Moreover, the desire of the creolist authors to speak both to and for the collective body of the Antillean people could also be interpreted as a form of revisionism of the past – a claim put forward by the anthropologist Richard Price. In his anthropological study of Martinique, Price is damning in his criticism of the works of the creolist authors because he considers them to idealise the past, looking back on the plantation era with a certain sentimentality. The creolist authors, he argues, are ‘on the whole complicitous with the celebration of a museumified Martinique [...]a picturesque and ‘pastified’ Martinique that promotes a ‘feel-good’ nostalgia for people who are otherwise busy adjusting to the complexities of a rapidly modernizing lifestyle’.²⁰ However, as will become clear in the course of this thesis, the colonial violence that characterises the authors’ work makes Price’s criticisms seem somewhat simplistic. So, despite the validity of some of these criticisms, a close analysis of the creolist authors’ works of fiction will address such complaints.

Gallagher asserts that ‘many French Caribbean novels bear witness to the irrevocable desire to make sense of the past’ (*Soundings in French Caribbean Writing*, p. 63). Before we can continue with an analysis of how Chamoiseau and

Studies – A Critical Introduction, eds. Charles Forsdick & David Murphy (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 112-121.

²⁰ Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998). p. 175.

Confiant begin this process, it is important to identify the different forms of violence that make the past so traumatic. Violence(s) is/are consistently represented throughout the fictional and literary works of Confiant and Chamoiseau. The violence(s) seem to be, for them, an important stimulus, for, as well as a major preoccupation of, their writing. This thesis will identify how this violence is represented in their work but more importantly, the range of responses that their work suggests. However, the process of writing is complicated by the tensions surrounding the process and indeed the very figure of the writer in the Antilles. Before we can begin to look more closely at the literary strategies employed by the creolist authors, the complex issues surrounding writing in the Antilles have to be explored in order to understand why literature has such an important role in contemporary Antillean society.

According to writings of the creolist authors, centuries of violent oppression and psychological domination mean that an Antillean literature has been denied a birth, '[n]ous sommes encore en état de pré littérature' (EC, p. 14). What comes across most strongly throughout their work is the sense of an authentic Antillean literary expression, having been suffocated under the strength of the universally perceived superiority of French culture and language. As writers, Chamoiseau and Confiant believe they must fight back using the power of communication, following from and developing the 'cry' of resistance that they consider to be the first representative Antillean sound: '[L]e *cri*, le cri original surgi des cales du bateau négrier et à la vibration duquel vient s'enraciner

notre littérature (*LC*, p. 170). Antillean literature, then, seems to be born of violence and continues to be shaped by it in both form and content

Certain difficulties and tensions facing the Antillean writer stem from the association of writing with French, the language of the colonisers. Over the centuries, with the arrival of Standard French, and eventually widespread education, the roles for Creole and French within Martinican society have changed. Because of the relationship with metropolitan France, French is considered to be the language of education and of social advancement while Creole is seen as the oral, spontaneous language of intimacy and familiarity.²¹ Nevertheless, the original formation of Creole by all members of the community (reflected in the composition of the language itself) complicates the rather straightforward notion of language 'imposition', and creates a set of linguistic tensions that do not necessarily exist in other postcolonial situations. Examples of this can be seen in the childhood *récits* of Chamoiseau and Confiant where they reveal their love of both Creole and French, suggesting that each language has contributed to their desire and ability to speak and write. However, because of the cultural imperialism referred to earlier, there is a sense of loyalty attached to Creole which was, after all, the language in which they first learned to speak and one that they do not wish to betray further by abandoning it. However, as these *récits* imply, the question of language choice is not that simple. While there is an emotional attachment to the Creole language, French has given both authors the

²¹ Georg Kremnitz, *Français et créole: ce qu'en pensent les enseignants: le conflit linguistique de la Martinique* (Hamburg: Verlag, 1983) and Christian March, *Le Discours des mères martiniquaises: diglossie et créolité: un point de vue sociolinguistique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996).

tools of expression with which to address a wide (and metropolitan) public, which is a form of liberty. We will return to these tensions in the final chapter and the Conclusion of this thesis but it is important to bear in mind the ambiguity surrounding both French and Creole in Martinique, especially for the writers who belong to this first generation of *départementalisation*.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the tensions described above, the function of the writer seems to hold a special fascination for the creolist authors. In their jointly written text *Lettres créoles*,²² they refer to the ‘divisions’ and ‘ruptures’ (p. 229) faced by Antilleans, making the sound of the ‘*cri*’ of resistance that rises from the slave ship inaudible. They ask, ‘[q]ui saura nous désigner cela et tout réconcilier?’ (p. 229). The answer is clear: ‘Des écrivains, bien sûr./ Même tardifs ils sont là...’ (p. 229). The Creole writer appears to hold the privileged position as one who is able to gather the dispersed fragments of the past and weave them together to create an overall Antillean version of history. In light of the Creole writer’s important position in the eyes of the creolist authors, it is therefore unsurprising to note that s/he appears in almost all of their novels as a central character: in Confiant’s *Le Nègre et l’amiral*, Amédée is a *mulâtre* writer whose novel *Mémoires de céans et d’ailleurs* is interwoven into the main narrative; Lysiane in *Brin d’amour* pours her thoughts into her *Calendrier d’une absence*,²³ which interrupts and often confuses the central narrative; the narrator in *Eau de*

²² Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres créoles – Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature de 1635-1975* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999). Future quotations from this text will be referenced as *LC*.

²³ *Brin d’amour* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2000). Future quotations from this novel will be referenced as *BA*.

Café similarly has returned to the place of his childhood to recall and write it up in an attempt to come to terms with it; Adeline in *Morne Pichevin* writes a Creole glossary; and the life of Mama Josépha in *La Dernière java de Mama Josépha* is reconstructed from her old letters.²⁴ Indeed, *L'Allée des soupirs* is the only one of Confiant's novels to be studied that does not feature a central character who writes.²⁵

Chamoiseau accords an equal place in his fiction to the role of the writer, as can be seen in the character of Marie-Sophie who discovers the pleasure of writing in *Texaco*; or the old slave in *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* who,²⁶ in his escape from the plantation and resulting liberation, acts as an allegory for the figure of the writer.²⁷ In Chamoiseau's case, this writer is often presented to the reader as a character who acts as a mediator between the text and the reader: the *marqueur de paroles*. For example, the writer figure/*marqueur*, known as Oiseau de Cham in *Solibo Magnifique* plays a central role as the narrator and also as one of the witnesses to the 'murder';²⁸ and finally, the narrator of the same

²⁴ *Morne Pichevin* (Paris: Bibliophane-Daniel Radford, 2002). *La Dernière java de Mama Josépha* (Paris: Mille et une Nuits, 1997). Future quotations from these works will be referenced as *MP* and *DJMJ*.

²⁵ *L'Allée des soupirs* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1994), Future quotations from this text will be referenced as *AS*.

²⁶ *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997). Quotations to this novel will be referenced as *EVHM*.

²⁷ Lorna Milne traces the emergence of the symbolic figure of the writer in her chapter, 'The *marron* and the *marqueur*: Physical Space and Imaginary Displacement in Patrick Chamoiseau's *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse*', in *Ici-Là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French*, ed. Mary Gallagher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 61-82. Further references to this chapter are given after quotations in the text

²⁸ *Solibo Magnifique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988). Quotations to this text will be referenced as *SM*

name in *Biblique des derniers gestes* interprets and transcribes the *gestes* of the hero Balthazar Bodule-Jules. The *marqueur* represents the cross-over point or the ‘in-between’ space where Creole meets French and thus where orality and writing meet. The adaptation of the orality of Creole into the written French word is a technique that is central to the literature of the creolist authors because it is the means of compromise between one language and the other. Indeed, the word *marquer* as the authors tell us in *Lettres créoles* in Creole ‘c’est écrire, c’est aussi solo-rythmer le concert des tambours-ka’ (*LC*, p. 257) and as such, seems to transcend both the written and the spoken word.

However, this portrayal of the writer figure/*marqueur* does not fit in with the image of writing in the Antilles outlined above, where French is the written language and Creole the oral one. Dominique Chancé in *L’Auteur en souffrance* explores the difficulty faced by the creolist authors who are determined to remain ‘faithful’ to their Creole roots but who also express themselves in written French. This dilemma is identified directly by the authors in *Eloge*, where they argue that Antillean literature does not yet exist. Instead, they declare, ‘nous sommes dans un état de pré littérature: celui d’une production écrite sans audience chez elle’ (*EC*, p. 14). Despite this difficulty, Chancé argues that writing is the only process through which the authors can validate their existence. However, the problem is that writing, in the fiction of the Creole writers, is ‘systématiquement associée à l’échec, à la honte’ (*L’Auteur en souffrance*, p. 66) because of its associations with the colonial master: ‘Dans un monde où l’écrit est instrument d’assujettissement et d’aliénation coloniale en effet, il n’est pas facile de s’avouer

écrivain' (*Ibid.*, p. 38). Chancé highlights the ambivalent position in which the creolist authors find themselves – torn between their desire to speak on behalf of the Antillean people and the risk of betraying them for that same reason.

Chancé's analysis of the search for validity undertaken by the Creole authors through the process of writing reinforces the ambiguous situation of the Antillean writer. Yet it is not only torn loyalties that are associated with writing in the Antilles. In her examination of the recent representation of writers in recent Antillean fiction, Chancé notes that they are often represented as figures linked with 'shame' and with 'failure' (*L'Auteur en souffrance*, p.66), undoubtedly because of the inability of the written word to express the Creole reality.

This additional burden gives us further insight as to why the creolist authors invent figures such as the *marqueur* to nuance the role of the writer in the Antilles. All of this complicates the central thread of the thesis and raises interesting challenges and theoretical dilemmas, given that an examination of the literary strategies employed by the creolist authors to come to terms with their painful past necessarily involves dealing with the process of writing itself and the tensions surrounding it within the context of the Antilles.

The deliberate visibility of the Creole writer (in the form of the *marqueur* or otherwise) is also highlighted by the critic Lydie Moudileno who provides an important exploration of the figure of the writer in contemporary Antillean

fiction.²⁹ In her analysis of Confiant's *Le Nègre et l'amiral*, she traces the fate of the *roman* written by the *mulâtre* Amédée, and, like Chancé, makes the association between writing (and writing in French) and self-destruction, symbolised in Amédée's eventual suicide. Like Chamosieau's *marqueur*, Moudileno sees in the figure of the writing *mulâtre* a mediator between two worlds – the popular Creole and the written French – and so a figure who attempts to unite two extremely different racial, cultural and linguistic aspects of Antillean society:

Comment écrire *Le Nègre et l'Amiral*, comment représenter, entre ces deux pôles figurant deux modes d'expression historiquement opposés, la réalité de leur interaction. (Moudileno, p. 62)

Of course, Amédée's suicide implies that this act is impossible, and that the divides are perhaps too large to unite. After Amédée's death, his novel is rescued by Philomène, his Creole lover who brings the novel alive by reading it aloud to the community, evoking, of course, the role of the *conteur*. While the *marqueur* translates the spoken word into the written, Philomène translates the written word into the spoken, reversing the process of writing as she moves between the two worlds, attempting to combine them. As a result of this movement, Moudileno defines Confiant as a 'tisserand' (Moudileno, p. 82), who weaves the elements of his Creole reality to create an overall Creole self.

²⁹ Lydie Moudileno, *L'écrivain antillais au miroir de sa littérature: mises en scène et mise en abyme du roman antillais* (Paris: Karthala, 1997). Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

We have seen that the fictional character of the writer cannot be considered to be straightforward, but is torn between the different tensions that inhabit Antilleans. Yet s/he is desperate to give her/his own version of events, to tell her/his own, individual story *and* the collective one. The movement and mediation evoked by both Moudileno and Chancé imply that writing in the work of Confiant and Chamoiseau is a process of constant negotiation, but also of validation. Dany Bebel-Gisler, the Guadeloupean linguist, describes the language dilemma in clear terms: '[I]l devient clair que le problème n'est pas tant de traduire le créole en français, mais de se traduire, nous traduire, nous dire, nous exprimer'.³⁰ This desire to 'tell', 'express oneself' and to 'translate oneself' is not simply about moving from Creole to French but is a means of writing one's story as the subject, rather than the object of events as, for example in Eurocentric stories, histories and anthropological accounts of the Antilles. Writing does not, therefore, stem from the 'expérience stérile' of cultural imperialism but comes from a newly-discovered Creole self. For, as Chancé states, 'la question de l'écriture est primordiale parce qu'elle a pour enjeu une émancipation à la fois théorique et politique' (*L'Auteur en souffrance*, p. 9). Writing can thus provide the authors with a form of freedom from the metropolitan version of their past that continues to weigh heavily on the present.

However, in order to overcome the close associations between writing and the suppression of French, such a process also straddles the gap between the orality of the authors' Creole roots and their own writing in French. The authors

³⁰ Dany Bebel-Gisler, *Le Défi culturel guadeloupéen* (Paris: Caribéennes, 1989), p. 30.

thus align themselves with one figure in particular: the *conteur*. The role of the *conteur* is described in detail in *Lettres créoles* and is assigned a pivotal importance; as the first person (man) to gather together the slaves using Creole fables and tales to resist the complete cultural domination of the colonial masters, he is considered by the authors to be the ‘papa’ (LC, p. 43) of the Antillean literary voice. According to Chancé, he is also ‘un symbole qui repère une violence historique sans la démontrer’ (*L’Auteur en souffrance*, p. 69). Chancé implies that in the *conteur*’s ability to ‘repérer’ the violence of the past without the explicit need to voice every single painful memory, a valid model for Creole writing is provided. As shall be seen in the course of this thesis, the authors seem to follow this ‘model’. This implicit way of conveying their message avoids a painful confrontation with the past but without diminishing its significance. This thesis will explore whether such a method enables Chamoiseau and Confiant to come to terms with the horrors of their collective past as well as their own ambivalent position as writers.

In our examination, there will be no single, over-riding theoretical perspective to avoid schematic readings that would prevent the texts from speaking for themselves. There is a danger that an blanket adherence to theory risks setting these texts within a framework that is overly general and too often ignorant of the specific context in which these texts are produced.³¹ That is not to say that theory is avoided nor its value refuted. On the contrary, when it clearly sheds light on themes and contexts, theory – or more accurately theories – is (are)

³¹ This is a point made by Nicholas Harrison in *Postcolonial Criticism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), a text that emphasises throughout the important relationship between literature and history.

called upon to *serve* the text but not the reverse. Ultimately the coherence of this study depends upon its thematic focus, that is, on its exploration of violence as the concept that unifies the authors in their attempt to come to terms with the horrors of the past through writing.

The need for Antilleans to confront colonial violence is a desire that has been identified by the Cuban author and academic, Antonio Benítez-Rojo who provides an illuminating approach to Caribbean texts in his critical work *The Repeating Island*.³² Benítez-Rojo suggests that all Caribbean writers seek to overcome the violence of their history and are continually looking for routes into ‘non-violence’, a means perhaps of moving beyond the brutalities of the past and also as a means of defining the essence of the Caribbean self, arguing that ‘Caribbean texts are fugitive by nature, constituting a marginal catalogue that involves a desire for nonviolence’ (Benítez-Rojo, p. 25). This categorical assertion that all Caribbean writers are searching for a way out of the violence that is so heavily characteristic of their origins seems to capture the essence of the creolist authors’ works. However, I would also argue that the recurrent theme of violence and its many different representations in the work of the creolist authors suggests that these Caribbean writers are not solely looking to avoid violence. Instead, they are keen to confront violence and manipulate it into their own writing as a way of disempowering it, or of weakening its impact. Benítez-Rojo backs up his theory with a description of the modern population of Caribbean

³² Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and Post-modern Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992). Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

people as filled with some kind of ancient rhythm. This rhythm is defined as ‘a certain kind of way’ (p. 10) in which all actions are carried out. He argues that ‘this certain kind of way’ arises out of the ‘desire to sublimate apocalypse and violence’ (p. 16) and it may find an outlet in any artistic performance – reading, singing, writing and so forth, but also in just being. In other words, he implies that one can move beyond the violence of the past in the pursuit of the aesthetic. Benítez-Rojo provides here a helpful tool with which to analyse how Chamoiseau and Confiant represent violence in their fictional work.

Both Chamoiseau and Confiant pinpoint colonialism and the plantation economy as the most damaging form of violence and in the next chapter of this thesis, I shall show how the authors consider the slave trade, and the plantation system that grew from it as a central, if not foundational, model of violence for Antillean society. Benítez-Rojo’s definition of the plantation as a ‘sterile machine’ is a useful metaphor for this thesis as it contains the image of a repeating pattern, or system, that is sterile in the sense that the violence of the past oppresses the Antillean people to the extent that their identity is ‘mise sous verrous’ (*EC*, p. 14) by ‘la domination d’un ailleurs’ (*Ibid.*, p. 14), which is of course metropolitan France. In their fiction, the creolist authors characterise this violence as unnatural and as such, it is depicted as an oppressive, even sterilising force in Antillean society. In the second part of this chapter, drawing on the theories of Benítez-Rojo and Memmi, I will examine how both Chamoiseau and Confiant set up the originary violence as a model that continues to structure Antillean society. Benítez-Rojo’s description of the plantation system (that relied

on the slaves for its very existence) as a machine around which an entirely new culture was constructed, provides a relevant framework for the kind of violent model the creolists imply exists in the Antilles. Memmi's analysis of the colonial system explicitly outlines the damaging, rigid social and psychological structure that human violence established, and from which, he suggests, there is no escape so long as the system remains in place. The rigidity of the hierarchical and racist social structure that was set up during slavery is portrayed by the authors as the mould that continues to structure contemporary Antillean society. In this way, as we shall see, the authors are using their fiction as a mirror for their Antillean readers, in an attempt to encourage a recognition of the originary social and human violence as, firstly, unnatural (in that it was imposed on the people who were themselves uprooted and not part of the local environment); and secondly to identify the painful, brutal origins of contemporary Antillean society.

The second chapter examines in detail how the creolist authors depict the oppressive mechanism of the colonial system as a machine that is repeated. I will examine how this impacts on human relationships, as they are portrayed by Chamoiseau and Confiant. Drawing on Memmi's analysis of the intense relationship between the colonised and the coloniser, this chapter will analyse how Confiant and Chamoiseau portray the damaging effect of the pattern of violence. This human violence manifests itself most obviously in the fiction of Chamoiseau and Confiant in the sexual relationships between men and women. A 'transmission' of violence through the centuries is perpetuated, the creolist authors imply, because of the 'model' of rape and sexual violence established

under the colonisers. The numerous occasions of sexual violence that occur in the fictional works of the creolist authors suggest to the reader that within such a ‘sterile’ system, it is impossible for healthy and ‘productive’ relationships to exist.

Indeed, their portrayal of women and sexuality has been the subject of recent attention (e.g. A. James Arnold, Lorna Milne) and has seen the creolist authors criticised for the perceived machismo and even misogyny of their fictional work. The latter part of the second chapter will explore the creolist authors’ fictional representations of sexual violence in the Antilles, referring in particular to postcolonial feminist critics such as Ania Loomba and Anne McClintock.³³ We will consider whether the natural, biological fertility of the female can offer a way out of the seemingly endless, damaging cycle of violence.

Having explored the human violence that the creolist authors consider to be connected to the originary violence of the middle passage, the third chapter begins to look at ways of overcoming the essentially male, colonial violence examined by creolist texts. For Benítez-Rojo, the desire to return to nature and the rhythms of the earth is an intuitive attempt to counteract and negate the violence of colonialism. As the creolist authors imply, biological fertility cannot provide a way out of the ‘sterile machine’ of colonialism and so the focus of this chapter turns to nature, and to a specifically Creole form of cultivation. Through analysis of the important fictional and symbolic representation of *le jardin créole*

³³ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995) and Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London, Routledge, 1998). Further references to these works are given after quotations in the text.

the Antillean landscape is shown to be a possible means of attaining independence from metropolitan France and liberating Creole culture. My analysis will explore whether, in metaphorical terms, this space can become a symbol of real and lasting independence in the works of the creolist authors. Drawing on other critics' reading of this Creole space, I will explore the allegorical and symbolic interpretations of the garden as a space, and suggest that in the work of Confiant and Chamoiseau, it represents an acceptance of their violent past and thus a move towards a more open future.

Chapter four examines another natural phenomenon in the Antilles: the sea. Needless to say, the sea is connected to the originary violence because of the middle passage; in addition, however, both Chamoiseau and Confiant consider it to be the birthplace of Antillean society, as well as a graveyard for the thousands of Africans who died there. It is therefore constructed, in the works of the authors, as in the Antillean imaginary, as a dangerous place, haunted by the ghosts of African slaves. I will also examine how the wider significance of this trope is constructed in the work of the creolist authors, focusing on its feminine, fertile associations and drawing on theories from feminist critics such as Cixous.³⁴ It is also important to note that the sea and all its metaphorical associations of fluidity and shifting movement have long been a central image in the works of many Caribbean authors (such as Perse, Césaire, Walcott and Glissant). By depicting the sea in their work, the creolist authors are therefore

³⁴ Hélène Cixous & Catherine Clément, *La Jeune née* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975). Further references to this study are given after quotations in the text.

positioning themselves firmly alongside their literary forefathers. The sea is thus a necessary space to explore as a natural connection to the past, and so can be considered as *un lieu d'origine* for Antillean society and also in the Antillean literary tradition.

In the fifth chapter, I return to the figure of the writer as outlined earlier in this introduction and examine whether it is the process of writing itself that allows the creolist authors to deal most effectively with the violence and trauma of the past. As Chancé and Moudileno demonstrate, the process of writing is itself bound up in a sterilising, suffocating violence that has been described by the critic A.J. Arnold as 'castrating' (Arnold, p. 32). The authors must break free from this form of violence if they are to validate themselves as writers and finally come to terms with the past. This conclusion will focus closely on the authors' joint text, *Lettres créoles*, where Confiant and Chamoiseau carefully establish the gradual emergence of a Creole literary voice and, I will argue, attempt to counter the suffocating violence of their birthplace. It becomes clear that the most important figure for them is the one they name as the 'papa' of their literary tradition: the *conteur*. Drawing on Lorna Milne's description of the 'fertilising powers' of the *conteur*,³⁵ I will examine how the creolist authors portray a strong determination to uncover these literary origins and to pinpoint when *la nouvelle littérature antillaise* was born. However, by establishing a literary genealogy, the authors seem to concentrate on the importance of the paternal line. This emphasis

³⁵ Lorna Milne, 'Sex, Gender and the Right to Write: Patrick Chamoiseau and the Erotics of Colonialism', in *Francophone Texts and Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Celia Britton & Michael Syrotinski (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), pp. 59-75.

on the literary father figure leads to an examination of the treatment of the female writer in the works of the creolist authors, who seem to embody many of the tensions facing all Antillean writers and who are represented as confronting the violence of the past in a specific way. Finally, in the conclusion to the thesis, I return to the original question and assess to what extent the process of writing has enabled the creolist authors to come to terms with their brutal history.

Chapter 1 – The Origins of Violence

The middle passage represents the beginning of the colonial process for the thousands of Africans who were brought to the French Caribbean to become slaves on the plantations. As the European colonisers took the slaves from such a wide area of Africa, their exact countries of origins remain unknown³⁶ and after four centuries, the link with Africa has become increasingly remote. Yet despite the administrative and historical relationship with metropolitan France, Africa was considered by many of the writers of the Negritude movement to be the motherland of the French Antilles, the place from which they originate. The creolist authors, by contrast, do not want to be aligned solely with Africa and are keen to stress the multiplicity of their origins. This is clear from their opening lines in *Eloge*, where they begin by stating with some vigour ‘Ni Africains, ni Européens, nous nous proclamons Créoles’ (EC, p.13). This emphasis on the plurality of their origins undoubtedly stems in part from a desire to differentiate themselves from Negritude, which focused on African roots. Nevertheless, they are keen to acknowledge its importance and contribution to their own movement of *créolité*. For example, Chamoiseau acknowledges in his essay *Ecrire en pays dominé* that his understanding of the slave trade itself is coloured by Césaire’s movement: ‘Cette horreur [la cale du bateau négrier] m’avait été hurlée par les chantres de la Négritude’.³⁷ Moreover, in this text, Chamoiseau relates how he

³⁶ For further detail see Armand Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*, 3 vols (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996), I, pp. 141-152.

³⁷ *Ecrire en pays dominé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 123. Future quotations from this text will be referenced as *EPD*.

himself went through a ‘Negritude’ phase and so implies that the movement has contributed to his own development as a writer.

Part 1: The Original Violence

Whatever distance the creolist authors assert from their African origins, the middle passage connects these origins to the beginnings of Antillean society, for it is during this crossing that the African person becomes the Antillean slave. The journey of the slaves across the Atlantic from Africa to the Antilles is always referred to in Chamoiseau’s and Confiant’s work as a brutal one. Indeed, its horror seems to haunt the imagination of many black Antillean writers from Césaire to the contemporary generation, who see this journey as the birthplace of Antilleans and the place where the cruel and violent relationship between the white coloniser and the black colonised really begins. Yet, both Confiant and Chamoiseau rarely make explicit reference to the violence partly because, as stated in *Lettres créoles*, it is so difficult to imagine, ‘Comment dire la cale negrière?’ (p. 38). Given the authors’ determination to reconstruct Antillean history from their own perspective, this tendency to gloss over the violence of the middle passage seems surprising. Confiant makes little direct use of the *traite* in his fictional writings, other than brief references to its brutality. Chamoiseau, in *Ecrire en pays dominé*, refers to the most terrifying dream of the ‘bateau négrier’ yet refuses to dwell on the actual brutality: ‘Passons vite sur l’horreur de la cale’ (p. 123). And in his recent novel, *Biblique des derniers gestes*,³⁸ he gives only a

³⁸ *Biblique des derniers gestes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002). Future quotations from this text will be referenced as *BDG*.

brief, but very vivid and memorable, description of the middle passage. However, through a close textual examination of the depiction of the slave ship in this text, it becomes clear that transcending the terrible imagined memories of the hold in the ship is difficult for Chamoiseau to do.

At 788 pages long, *Biblique* is Chamoiseau's longest novel. Through the interweaving of fantasy and reality, it re-constructs the life of the mythical M. Balthazar Bodule-Jules. His life spans four centuries and is relayed as intuited by a narrative 'je', the writer or *marqueur*, who observes and witnesses Balthazar's countdown towards death. It is from the *marqueur's* imaginative perspective that Balthazar's struggles, torments and battles, which are all anti-colonialist, can be read as a (consciously subjective) account of the progression of Antillean society from the time of slavery until the present day. Like the narrator, the *marqueur* is there to relay to the reader the largely fantastical events of Balthazar's life. While Balthazar sits in his chair in silence, the *marqueur* focuses intently on interpreting the slightest movement of Balthazar's expression, and then transcribes all that he sees and imagines. As his old age advances, Balthazar comes to terms with the violent rage that inhabited him throughout his many campaigns, and from this perspective, the reader is presented with the coming of age of a whole society. The novel begins as Balthazar announces his imminent death in 'trente-trois jours, six heures, vingt-six minutes, vingt-cinq secondes' (p. 15), a statement that seems to ridicule any desire for precision and detail and sets out to confuse the reader by beginning with an imminent ending. Thus, from the outset Balthazar

consciously embodies Antillean specificities, such as concepts of time, set in opposition to Western ones. The following analysis focuses on the ‘douloureuse Genèse’ (*BDG*, p. 58) of the middle passage where Balthazar appears to find himself on a slave ship.

The repeated use of the biblical term ‘Genèse’ in *Biblique* (itself a title reinforcing the mythical effects in the text) is a clear inference that Chamoiseau considers the middle passage to be a sort of mythical beginning for the Antilles.³⁹ However, its rewriting into terms such as the mysterious-sounding ‘Genèse autre’ or qualification with adjectives such ‘douloureuse’, suggest that this Genesis cannot be viewed as a positive beginning. Furthermore, its remembrance causes Balthazar’s body to freeze up, ‘Il semblait pétrifié dans une décomposition dont *la violence* élimina tout signe de vie en lui’ (p. 56, my emphasis). The physical paralysis of his body, which seems transformed into a corpse, leaves the reader in no doubt about the horrific nature of the ‘genesis’, which, rather than filling Balthazar with life, has the opposite effect. This journey across the ocean is also described as ‘Le crime fondateur des peuples des Amériques’ (p. 57). The use of the word ‘crime’ implies that what took place was a mass murder that was carried out on behalf of the colonisers and that this original ‘sin’ marks the birth of the Antilles. This impression is accentuated by the repeated description of the ship as a cradle, albeit a ‘terrible berceau’ (p. 59). Although Chamoiseau’s references to the middle passage indicate that this journey marks a beginning for Antilleans, it is a genesis that is nevertheless described in terms of pain, violence and

³⁹ I use the word ‘mythical’ here because there is so much about the middle passage that can only be imagined. We will return to imagined and mythical beginnings in Chapter 3.

destruction of life. I will return to the metaphors of birth used by Chamoiseau to describe the middle passage, but for the meantime will focus upon the horror of the foundations of Antillean society.

Before looking in detail at the description of Balthazar's sojourn on the slave ship, it is important to note that the violence of conditions on board is not described to us 'first-hand' by Balthazar but by the *marqueur de paroles*. In several of Chamoiseau's previous novels for example – *Texaco* – the *marqueur* is used as a mediator between the past and present, between Creole orality and written French, transcribing the former into the latter. The reader is often made to doubt, or at least question, the reliability of the *marqueur*, because of the way in which he will cast doubt on his own memory or upon his interpretation of events. For example, before reconstituting Balthazar's time in the slave ship in *Biblique*, the *marqueur* tells us 'J'ignore comment le sentiment de cette douleur me parvint soudain' (BDG, p. 56). This type of interruption acts as a constant reminder to the reader that there is no direct access to each story but that our knowledge is constantly dependent on the *marqueur*, who himself is not always sure of his own version. Thus, there is a sense that this single, unreliable voice is not an authoritative one.

However, in *Biblique*, Chamoiseau expands the role of the *marqueur* who interprets and translates the gestures, and not the words, of Balthazar, leaving further room for doubt and confusion on the reader's behalf. In *Biblique*, the *marqueur* is the reader's only point of access to any part of the story. Indeed, the

marqueur plays a vital role in Chamoiseau's apparent refusal to give ownership of the narrative to any of his characters. Through this technique, Chamoiseau seems to be suggesting that any authoritative account of origins is impossible. There are no eye-witnesses, and therefore any account stems from the imagination. Here, Chamoiseau transfers the 'unknowability' of Antillean origins into fiction, rendering his own narrative equally slippery and opaque. It is perhaps for this reason that the violence perpetrated against the slaves during the *traite* is not often detailed explicitly in the text. Instead, the *marqueur* informs us that Balthazar, in his younger days, would evoke the horrors of these crossings with 'de[s] détails terrifiants' (p. 57): yet the reader is sheltered from the stories by the *marqueur*, who does not repeat the 'détails', a strategy which almost makes their imagined brutality more sinister and mysterious. For, as the *marqueur* states, 'On peut tout imaginer en termes de tortures, de blessures, de misères, d'injustices, de désespoirs, d'actes de mutilation' (p. 57). Violence is certainly referred to through the use of words such as 'blessures' and 'tortures', but the reader is given no more detail, a tactic which has the effect of widening or generalising the violence evoked. This technique in particular forces the reader to call on her/his imagination and thus become involved. The quotation also suggests that there are no words to describe the 'horreur' that occurred on the slave ships, that it is beyond the resources of language. In this way, as we shall see, the violence of the slave ship is largely implied in this novel as elsewhere in Chamoiseau's work.

An impression of the slaves' violent 'naissance abominable' (p. 57)
aboard the ship emerges from the description of the conditions in the hold.

Although the physical conditions of the slave ship are described from Balthazar's perspective, the emphasis is on collective suffering. Six hundred slaves are described 'entassé[s]' in the hold of the ship, and they seem to become indistinguishable from one another as 'Les pieds et les mains se nouaient et se renouaient dans les convulsions [...] la chaleur, l'asphyxie, les vomissures, les excréments' (p. 60). The individual human bodies seem to have become one twitching, indefinable mass trapped in a terrible confusion. While no violence is explicit here, the image of the slaves' terrifying imprisonment indicates the brutality of the system. What is implied is a destruction or suffocation of the individual, depriving him of humanity and reducing him to the level of the waste matter (vomit and faeces) that surround her/him.⁴⁰ This denial of individual humanity is perhaps the ultimate violence and degradation that one human being may inflict upon another, by obliterating his individual otherness.

In addition to the dehumanising conditions of the ship experienced by the slaves, there is a sense of pervading hunger. In reality, there was generally very little sustenance on board the slave ships, with most for the use of the captain and his crew, leaving just enough to keep the slaves alive.⁴¹ The casual starvation of the slaves evoked by Chamoiseau is perhaps not a dramatically active form of violence but because of its carelessness and indifference it appears destructive. Such a lack of concern for the slaves' lives seems especially pitiless because

⁴⁰ For further detail see fictional accounts like Simone Schwarz-Bart's *La Mulâtresse Solitude* (Paris: Seuil, 1972) and historical ones by Marie Abraham in Marie Abraham & Gisèle Pineau's *Femmes des Antilles* (Paris: Stock, 1998) and indeed Chamoiseau's account of the woman slave analysed below.

⁴¹ Accounts of the conditions aboard the ship can be found in Armand Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*, 3 vols (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), I, pp. 152-158.

again, it seems to dehumanise them. Chamoiseau uses to strong effect his description of the physical impact of the continual, gnawing hunger on the ship in *Biblique*. This approach works on two levels: firstly, it suggests to the reader the terrible physical conditions endured by the slaves; and secondly it alludes to the symbolic violence of such hunger. So, when Balthazar talks of ‘la faim animale, la maladie de toutes les maladies’ (*BDG*, p. 59) that inhabits the ‘noir sans passé’, or new beginning, on the ship, the insertion of ‘animale’ indicates the virulent ferocity of the hunger, as does its description of the illness, which also indicates its intensely debilitating effect. The reader is given an idea of the way in which hunger takes over the body, further dehumanising the slave. In addition, phrases connected with food and eating are scattered throughout the narrative: the ‘noir stomacal’ (p. 59) and the ‘boyau ténébreux’ (p. 60) describe the ship’s innards; the door of the ship seems like ‘une gueule’ (p. 60), and there is ‘la friture d’écume’ (p. 63) and ‘un bouillon de sang’ (p. 62) as the bodies of slaves thrown overboard are eaten by sharks. All of these suggest that Balthazar, in reliving the middle passage, is so obsessed with hunger that food associations involuntarily permeate his language.

Mireille Rosello has examined the way in which the hunger of the slaves is a theme that appears regularly in French Antillean literature, from the everyday *contes* and oral traditions to Césaire’s hyperbolic language.⁴² She assesses the obsessive reference to ‘nourriture’ and explores its metaphorical associations. Rosello points to the etymological roots of ‘assimilation’ as the absorption of

⁴² Mireille Rosello, *Littérature et identité aux Antilles* (Paris: Karthala, 1992), pp. 113-134.

food to suggest that food is used by many writers almost as an emblem for the Antilles. This leads her to state that in this literature, ‘la faim se métamorphose, devient un langage, une façon de penser, de percevoir le monde “réel”, et de le décrire’ (Rosello, p. 118). In the brief episode in *Biblique* where Balthazar is on the ship, the theme of hunger is heavily present, and the language dotted with literal or metaphorical allusions to it. However, above all, it is the sense of digestion that is most striking, as the ship ‘digérait’(p. 60) its 600 slaves. From the slaves’ point of view, it is not even a process of assimilation that is described, but one of being almost literally swallowed up and of losing a sense of self. For during the journey across the Atlantic the former self and identity of the slave is indeed disappearing. This is explicitly mentioned by Balthazar who makes a direct link between the progress of the ship and his increasing inability to remember anything about Africa: ‘D’heure en heure, de jour en jour, de semaine en semaine, l’angoisse et l’incompréhension s’étaient muées en *un ferment gastrique qui décomposait chaque atome de son être*’ (p. 59, my emphasis). Yet, what is particularly forceful about this image is the total destruction of the slave’s sense of self. The death of his former self is not a quick and painless procedure but is dragged out as each individual atom is broken down, having its very structure destroyed. This gives a sense of the intensity and thoroughness of the procedure, as we have an almost microscopic view of it. The image of a ‘ferment gastrique’ evokes once again the notion of the ship as a stomach that is breaking down and destroying the mass contained within it. The overall impression formed by these monstrous images and metaphors is that the slave ships are transformed

into a huge, ogreish, digestive machine that reduces everyone to an amorphous paste that nourishes the slave trade (the voracious monster) and reduces the slaves to fodder (or to excrement and vomit). As such, the ‘anéantissement’ (p. 64) of the slaves is complete and they arrive on land as if from this dreadful void, or ‘gouffre-océan’ (p. 62). The violence present in this destruction of the slaves appears intensely slow, a sensation created by the detailed timing of this digestive process ‘de seconde en seconde [...] D’heure en heure, de jour en jour, de semaine en semaine’ (p. 59), suggesting that Chamoiseau does not see the rupture with Africa as a clean – if brutal – break. Instead, by using the metaphors of food to trace the beginning of the process of colonial assimilation, he highlights its slow and completely erosive force.

However, some images of digestion are more overtly violent, as the following examples reveal. The associations with digestion and consumption are not just present in the interior of the ship but seem to seep into every aspect of the journey so that the slaves seem under threat from every angle. As Balthazar slowly becomes aware of what is happening, the ship comes to a halt, unable to move because of the lack of wind ‘comme sous l’effet d’une malédiction’ (*BDG*, p. 61). As the time passes, the sharks begin to gather and the captain becomes increasingly worried. He decides to lighten the load of his cargo by chaining thirty slaves together and throwing them overboard. There then follows a violent, graphic account of what happens to the slaves’ bodies, collectively described as an individual ‘rangée’ (p. 62). It ‘brisa la plaque d’acier et disparut dans un bouillon de sang et d’ailerons de requins’ (*BDG*, p. 62). The brutal sound of

bodies breaking into the ‘steeliness’ of the sea points firstly to the weight of the slaves’ bodies and forces the reader to realise that they are humans and not mere items of cargo. But secondly, it creates a sense of the sea as sinister and menacing, merciless to the slaves.⁴³ The sudden, horrific transition from human bodies to a ‘bouillon de sang’ leaves the reader in no doubt about the violence of the slaves’ demise.⁴⁴ Here, they are physically annihilated in the jaws of the sharks. This ‘offrande’ (p. 61) seems to delight the sailors and they sing in joy; yet the ship still does not move so the captain throws over another ‘rangée’:

Puis une autre. Puis une autre. Les requins dévorèrent durant cette semaine-là plus de deux cents de ces rebuts de chairs, et, bien qu’ils fussent innombrables, on vit flotter dans l’éclat métallique des icebergs de peau noire et de caillots de sel qui semblaient baliser un songe d’apocalypse. (*BDG*, p. 62)

In contrast to the first description, the violence here is barely explicit; the focus is not on the actions of the captain or even on the feelings of the slaves but rather, first, on the sharks as they ‘dévorèrent’ the slaves’ bodies. This image also returns us to the obsession with hunger by implying the sharks’ voracity and their delight at this feast. The images indicate such a degree of cruelty partly because the reader is aware that the story is based on fact, but also because of our own imaginary involvement. The image of the slaves chained together increases the

⁴³ We will return to the way in which the sea is constructed in the fictional works of the creolist authors in Chapter 4.

⁴⁴ The word ‘bouillon’ also evokes the liquid imagery associated with Origins by the creolist authors in *Eloge*: ‘Notre Créolité est notre soupe primitive et notre prolongement, notre chaos original et notre mangrove de virtualités’ (p. 28).

sense of imprisonment, emphasising that even in death they have lost their individual liberty completely: the repeated description of them as a ‘rangée’ dehumanises them into a collective mass that is treated by the crew just like any other form of cargo. Indeed, the word contains industrial associations, as if the slaves are produced from this machine of the slave trade in ‘batches’, an effect that is underpinned by the metallic glint of the sea as if from machinery. This association has been expanded on by Antonio Benítez-Rojo, who argues that the plantation is a ‘machine’, one that ‘repeats itself continuously’ (Benítez-Rojo, p. 8) and that creates a ‘family of machines [which] usually produces the Plantation, capitalised to indicate not just the presence of plantations but also the type of society that results from their use and abuse’ (Benítez-Rojo, p. 9). The notion of the plantation as an (abusive) machine will be explored in the following section. Here, however, we may note the way in which the treatment of the slaves shows that they are clearly considered simply as fodder in that machine. The sense of their loss of individuality is emphasised by the description of them as ‘rebutts de chair’ that are ‘innombrables’, which also indicates that within the overall mass is a colossal number of slaves that do not survive.

The physical destruction of the slaves is carried out not by the crew (although they are responsible for throwing them to their death), but by the sharks. The violence of what Balthazar is witnessing (and that is being recounted to us via the imagination of the *marqueur*) is most palpable in the description of what happens to the bodies. The image of the icebergs of black skin is contradictory and confusing, given that ice is usually white and not to be found in this part of

the Atlantic. This sense of confusion seems deliberately constructed by Chamoiseau to convey to the reader a sense of unnaturalness, not just about the 'icebergs' but also the whole process of the slave trade and the way in which it completely rendered the slaves' world so alien. Furthermore, the suggestion of the sharp, cutting edges of ice and of the sharks' fins emphasise the way in which the bodies have been ripped apart by the sharks – leaving limbs and body parts jutting out at all angles. Added to this gruesome image are the 'caillots de sel', evoking the white colour and suggesting that the skin has been completely ripped away from the bone, for there is no way for a 'caillot de sel' to form in the sea without dissolving and becoming invisible. The image of human destruction is never far away, however, as the usual collocation is of course 'caillot de sang': the reader is forced to imagine the globules of flesh and blood vividly. The violent, physical dismembering and eating of the slaves' bodies in the sea recalls the digestion of the slaves in the ship described above. Therefore, the continual literal and symbolic references to digestion combine to suggest that the process of the middle passage annihilates the slaves completely, as the above analysis indicates: first as some are physically destroyed by the sharks, the other slaves are being subjected to psychological destruction in the giant 'noir stomacal' (p. 59) of the ship. The process seems to lead to a gradual erosion of both body and identity, disappearing not only into the mouths of the sharks, but also into one another, morphing into an anonymous collective mass. It appears that they have been completely annihilated – assimilated into the bowels of the ship.

In addition to the gruesome image of the slaves being fed to the sharks in a frantic attempt by the captain to lighten his load, the scene is also described in the quotation above as an ‘apocalypse’ (p. 62). This word suggests not only violence but wholesale death, destruction and the end of the world. Chamoiseau’s use of the word is effective for several reasons. Firstly, the reader is forced to consider the scale of the violence of the slave trade as a sudden and mythical end of the world for the African slaves. Secondly, the inclusion of the terms Genesis and Apocalypse (‘enfer génésique’ [p. 56], ‘douloureuse Genèse’ [p. 58] as well as a ‘songe d’apocalypse’ [p. 62]) creates the impression that birth and death are inextricably linked. Chamoiseau’s deliberate juxtaposition of life and death will be explored in the following section in order to examine to what extent the ‘origins’ of the slaves emerge from a violent and absolute death of the former self.

The Conception of Violence

It is significant that the ‘apocalypse’ (p. 62) occurs at the very point where Balthazar’s ‘nouvelle conscience’ (p. 59) emerges in the depths of the ship, when he suddenly becomes aware of a corpse lying against him in the ‘terrible berceau’ (p. 59). Here, in his ‘genèse autre’ (i.e. the birth of his ‘other’ self) he is about to witness the apocalyptic scene described in the quotation above. Yet in order to reach this stage of awareness, Balthazar is first touched by death:

La chair glacée voulait lui aspirer son restant de chaleur, tentait d’entrer en lui, de l’avaler entier [...] Il avait basculé en elle, elle s’était introduite

en lui, et l'avait dispersé dans les chairs défaites tout au long de la cale.
(*BDG*, pp. 59-60)

There is a curious sexuality present in this meeting of flesh, yet also a violence in the determination of the corpse to penetrate Balthazar's living body, almost as in a rape, or an insidious and unwanted sexual advance. Balthazar recoils but is unable to move away because of the 'croc des fers fixés' that bind his body to the corpse. Like an animal, he is caught in a trap and cannot escape and so has to endure the assault of the dead flesh. The icy touch of the corpse seems remarkably full of vitality, in its urgency to pull the heat from Balthazar like a 'ventouse' (p. 59), creating an overall sense of its frantic desire to take Balthazar 'under' with it. Its actions are almost like those of a vampire, or *zombie* – it is desperate to suck the life from Balthazar and absorb all of his heat. This sensation is intensified by the description of the corpse's flesh as 'glaciale comme un abîme' (p. 59) while Balthazar fights his 'vertige' to avoid death. Death is always present in the middle passage in the threat of the void, as well as in the motif of digestion.⁴⁵

The image of the corpse trying to swallow Balthazar whole further prolongs the theme of digestion. Yet when the flesh of the corpse meets Balthazar's flesh, there is a brief moment of ecstasy as they seem to communicate

⁴⁵ References to the 'abyss' are frequent in Chamoiseau's descriptions of the middle passage, and its significance has been analysed by Lorna Milne in 'Metaphor and Memory in the Work of Patrick Chamoiseau', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 42 (2003), 90-100 (p. 90). In this article she draws out the mythical, traditional associations between the 'abyss' and the 'tomb'. Further references to this article are given after quotations in the text.

with each other, 'Il avait basculé en elle, elle s'était introduite en lui, et l'avait dispersé dans les chairs défaites tout au long de la cale' (pp. 59-60). As he is penetrated by the dead flesh, Balthazar seems aware for the first time of the collective suffering rather than focusing on his own pain. This particular moment can be read as a form of sexual release – the flesh of the corpse seems to penetrate Balthazar as he simultaneously becomes aware of what is going on around him. Balthazar's experience seems to contain a hint of orgasm, and one that is depicted as female (he is penetrated by the corpse's flesh), dispersed rather than localised, and tinged with a sense of communion with his surroundings. Through this bizarre union, he is flooded with the knowledge of his people and his history. Yet although he is penetrated, *he* is the one who is born as a result of this 'fertilisation' by death. This birth of his 'other' self occurs through a form of communion with death, implying that through this process, Balthazar is accepting the death of his former life and acknowledging the new one. The sense of birth is made explicitly in the text as the *marqueur* informs us that 'M. Balthazar Bodule-Jules se déclarait né là, au pile-exacte de cette conscience' (p. 60).

Simultaneously he feels the 653 men, women and children move inside him in the same way as a pregnant mother feels her child kick inside her – a sign of future life. Therefore, a collective birth accompanies Balthazar's individual one, and he acts as a representative of all his fellow slaves. This birth is above all a symbolic one (his 'real' birth occurs several centuries later in Morne Rouge in Martinique).

According to the anthropologist of religion Mircea Eliade,⁴⁶ all cosmogonic myths refer back to the period preceding a ‘rupture’ that signals the passage into the next world. The purpose of these myths is to remember the past and to transport it into the present through a re-enactment of that particular myth. Chamoiseau lays the foundations of such a myth in *Biblique*. The very title of the book indicates that this novel should be read as a sort of Antillean bible. In much of the Western world and in the Antilles, as a result of the colonial process, the first book of the bible is taken to be the story of the world’s origins. As such, it is not seen as a work of fiction but assumes the status of a single and absolute truth. Chamoiseau chooses the adjective ‘Biblique’ rather than the noun ‘Bible’, which suggests that he is not trying to create a counter-version to the Christian one. Instead, Chamoiseau uses the terms ‘Genesis’ and ‘Apocalypse’ in order to construct a cosmogonic myth around the formation of the Antillean population.⁴⁷ Through these clear biblical associations, he is informing the reader that this will be an account of origins. The apocalyptic scene that takes place before the representative Genesis and the fact that Balthazar’s birth was fertilised by death give a strong sense to the reader that both violence and (the threat of) death are woven into the ‘birth’ of Antillean society.

The image of Balthazar being sequentially broken down and destroyed, fertilised and then (re-)born, all within in his own body can be better explained if we turn to Chamoiseau’s essay *Ecrire en pays dominé*. Here, Chamoiseau is

⁴⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries – The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 47.

⁴⁷ The construction of a myth surrounding the beginnings of Antillean society through fiction will be explored further in Chapter 3.

imagining the different ‘elements’ that have formed him (Amerindian, African and so forth). In his imagined reliving of the middle passage, he finds himself – like Balthazar – in the hold of the ship, ‘Là où je me voyais déconstruit au plus profond comme pour renaître, souple, à de plurales genèses’ (*EPD*, p. 124). This quotation suggests that the ‘deconstruction’ of the (slave’s) former self on the ship strengthens the body, rendering it more ‘supple’ as a result of what it has endured. The proximity of death on the slave ships – in the corpses chained to the living slaves and in its imminent threat more generally – implies that it is indelibly marked in the mind and body of the new slave. As will be seen below, the establishment of this juxtaposition between life and death becomes a model in the creolist authors’ fiction that will pattern all thinking about origins in their work.

Among the critics who have discussed literary representations of these beginnings, Lorna Milne examines the way in which the traumatic experience of the slave is embedded in the Antillean collective memory and how it continues to inform Chamoiseau’s fiction. She highlights the use of the metaphor of the womb to describe the ship, drawing on traditional initiatory symbolism as well as Chamoiseau’s novels and essays to show how the hold is also perceived as a metaphorical ‘tomb’. Milne draws out the juxtaposition that Chamoiseau sets up in several of his novels between death and rebirth in his descriptions of the slave trade, and the above analysis of *Biblique* does indeed confirm that the middle passage can be seen as the place of death and re-birth of the slaves as they are taken to their new lives on the plantations. The ship can be seen as the

metaphorical matrix, surrounded by the dark amniotic waters of the sea where the human cargo is suspended in limbo, between life and death, temporarily obliterating the usual oppositions between life and death as the dead flesh and Balthazar 'commune'.

However, while there is undoubtedly the same contrast between death and birth in *Biblique*, our own textual analysis suggests that rather than a 'womb', the key metaphor associated with the ship's hold is more visceral. The multiple allusions to 'digestion' and 'décomposition', accompanied by the destruction of the self in the 'noir stomacal', or the 'entrails' of the ship, creates the sense of a large gut, rather than that of a womb. It is in the narrow passage of the gut that the food is transformed by the body into waste, recalling the earlier references to 'vomissures' and 'excréments'. The creation of a new subject (in the form of Balthazar's difficult rebirth in *Biblique*) has been read here as a symbolic image that reflects the violence that occurred on board the slave ships. The rest of this chapter will examine how this process is figured as a 'machine' in the writings of both Chamoiseau and Confiant – a machine which, they imply, continues to operate in contemporary Antillean society. All of the examples explored above construct a picture of a psychological form of violence that mirrors the physical violence and robs the slaves of their selfhood and identity. The improbability of Balthazar's story does not undermine the vividness of the depiction. On the contrary, not only does Balthazar's 'birth' four hundred years earlier make him emblematic of the whole Creole people whose origins are represented by him, but the fantastical aspect of Balthazar's re-birth aboard the ship and the impossibility

of his living for four centuries also creates a sense of absurdity and disbelief that is similar to the feelings of the reader as s/he encounters the middle passage through his eyes. Chamoiseau thus blurs fact (the existence of the slave trade) with a form of imaginative realism (Balthazar's life). This literary technique confuses the reader's sense of reality, and seems to want him to feel disbelief that the 'crime' of the slave trade could have taken place, displaying such disregard for human life on such an enormous scale. The following section of this chapter will demonstrate how the authors imply that this 'crime' set a pattern for violence in Antillean society.

Part 2: A Pattern of Violence

Chamoiseau makes it clear that the violence Balthazar witnesses on the ship is the trigger to the violence that will motivate and define the rest of his life. The following section shows how the implicit and generalised violence of the middle passage and its particular effect on the slaves is transformed (through Balthazar's actions) into a more detailed, explicit violence. We will argue that any life that survived the middle passage was indelibly damaged by the destruction that took place in the ship's hold. This violent impregnation marks the future slave and begins a cycle of violence that, this chapter argues, has never been exhausted. For the slave in turn reacts to the pervasive destruction surrounding her/him on the ship and responds in one of two ways: self-destruction or revenge.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Labat's account of his travels refers to the large number of slaves who committed suicide upon arrival on the plantations. He describes how the 'nègres de la côte de la Mine [...] se désespèrent, se pendent, se coupent la gorge sans façon pour des sujets fort médiocres', J.-B. Labat, *Voyage*

After the ‘apocalypse’ witnessed by Balthazar, his increased awareness of his surroundings has attuned his senses to the distress around him so that he is able to hear ‘le cri de la femme’ (p. 62). The use of the definite article immediately indicates to the reader that this woman, unmentioned until this point, is significant. She has fallen into the water but miraculously manages to cling on to the edge of the ship. Her importance to Balthazar – and to the narrative as a whole – is symbolised by the fact that ‘la chute de ce corps sembla dénouer la Malédiction’, (p. 63) as the winds finally pick up and the ship is able to move on after the weeks of stagnation. Such is her apparent determination to live that her nails have penetrated the wood of the boat, as if she has become part of the boat itself, floating between life and death. For the first time, Balthazar is moved to act and abandons his position as mere observer:

Il lui parla immédiatement. Murmura des sons rassurants. Gratta le bois avec ses fers de la manière douce et rythmée d’une berceuse. Il poussa vers elle une exaltation de tendresse et de compassion [...] Malgré l’impossible qui dressait la paroi, il la serra contre lui, la rassura, apaisa ses sanglots, adoucit le vif de sa désolation, but son fleuve de détresse, aspira son malheur. (BDG, p. 64)

aux Isles: Chronique aventureuse des Caraïbes 1693-1705 (Paris: Phébus, 1993) p. 106. The slaves believed that by killing themselves they would be able to return to their homeland. This reveals the terror felt by many of the slaves when they arrived on land. Labat, however, remains largely unsympathetic to the slaves’ plight. He concludes that these suicides were committed for selfish reasons, which deliberately inconvenienced their ‘maître’. Labat’s attitude is also revelatory – the slaves are considered as ‘sauvages’ with little human value.

The poignant tone of this incident and its fleeting intensity (for the woman eventually slips away to a suicidal death) is the reader's first encounter with a living, humanised character on the ship. Her eventual suicide demonstrates the woman's loss of will to live and acts as a contrast with Balthazar's birth: while he almost dies, something wills him to stay alive despite the horror of his condition. After the account of the widespread dehumanisation and death on board, there is a narrative shift here to focus more closely on the suffering of a single and individualised Other. Such treatment contrasts with the indifference of the crew who, as the earlier quotations suggest, simply see the slaves as fodder. Furthermore, Balthazar's gentleness towards the unnamed woman momentarily takes the reader away from the overwhelming sense of destruction. There appears to be a subversion here of the master's instruments by the slaves as the chains cease to restrict and oppress, and the tapping sound on the wood transforms the ship into a comforting cradle (as opposed to the earlier reference to the 'terrible berceau'). This is the first indication of hope since the beginning of the depiction of the middle passage, implying that love can (momentarily) overcome the surrounding horrors. Indeed this woman, as *Biblique* tells us, is the first of his '727 amours' and is the first description of Chamoiseau's many references to women, and in particular to women's strength in the face of violence. The connection made by both Chamoiseau and Confiant between women and power with all its associations of maternity, healing, fluidity and sexuality will be analysed in the next chapter, where we shall discover two antithetical stereotypes of women in works by these authors: maternal guardian angel and sexual

predator. Here, however, Balthazar himself is portrayed in a soothing, healing role that is almost maternal in its description. The images of his physical absorption of the woman's pain as he 'drinks' her distress sets up a contrast with his earlier encounter with the dead body. This relieving, kind communion between the two, rather than a kiss of death, returns us to the notion of consumption, but in this case it is in a more positive form. Yet the woman's tears and sorrow indicate the overwhelming terror she feels and they also remind the reader that the couple are surrounded by water and that she is on the brink of drowning. Therefore, despite the gentleness of the tone, the reader is never truly allowed to forget where the couple are.

It is this moment that appears to signify the beginning of the cycle of violence to which I alluded earlier. When the woman dies, Balthazar is also 'anéanti' (p. 64), and realises that 'il l'avait (durant cette fulgurante éternité) aimée de toute la force et *de toute la révolte dont il serait capable durant son existence*' (p. 64, my emphasis). By this analeptic formula, the *marqueur* interrupts the account of Balthazar's recollection of the slave trade to bring the reader back to the present day. This suggests a direct connection between the impact of the suicide of this anonymous woman aboard the slave ship and the old man in his death agony, a connection that seems to symbolise both the courage and the despair of the millions transported during the middle passage. The quotation above indicates that the woman's death is the trigger to Balthazar's transformation into a *guerrier* who will go on to fight many battles against colonisers around the world. Balthazar, almost destroyed by his loss, is moved by

his powerful feelings of frustration. This, combined with the knowledge that he could not save her, has made him determined to fight against oppressive systems the world over. The *marqueur*'s description of this episode's effect on Balthazar four hundred years on turns it into a mythical tale which 'avait laissé dans ses muscles, dans son esprit, une émotion inextinguible' (p. 65). Like the corpse in the hold, the mythified remnants of this woman's suffering and of his own emotion seem embedded in Balthazar's flesh, a 'mémoire charnelle' (p. 65) that seems to have penetrated into every cell in his body. Destruction, violence and pain are thus all sown into Balthazar's symbolic fertilisation and subsequent birth and, through this representative status, into the origins of Antillean society. This particular birth can be read as an allegory for the memory of injustice long past which inhabits and shapes Antillean imaginary today, 400 years later.

The causal link between the woman's death and Balthazar's movement into violence is made explicitly, as 'la révolte éclata juste après le suicide de la femme' (p. 66), a revolt led by a 'guerrier' (p. 66) who can only be Balthazar. Just as the woman has lost all her strength and submits to the water around her, Balthazar finds his strength, almost as if she transfers it to him during their communion. In a sense therefore, the unnamed woman gives life to Balthazar, a recurrent feature in *Biblique*: Balthazar's mother gives him up, to offer him a chance in life with Man L'Oubliée in the forest; Man L'Oubliée is happy to spend her life watching over him and Déborah transfers her ideological battles onto him. This systematic pattern of female strength as life-giving symbols is a recurrent

theme in the works of the creolist authors, and will be more thoroughly explored in the following section.

On the ship, the terrifying fear of the beginning of the journey has exploded into a violent rebellion. Balthazar searches out the captain to exact his revenge and the description of the direct confrontation between master and slave is explicitly violent: 'Il l'avait égorgé d'un coup de sabre sans même lui dire un mot. Pris d'une sainte fureur, il lui avait tranché la tête, arraché le cœur, coupé les mains, et avait levé ces trophées.' (p. 66). It is significant that Balthazar rips out the captain's heart, as if to emphasise the lack of human feeling shown by the captain to the slaves. Similarly, the amputation of his captor's hands is equally symbolic, given that the slaves' hands had been bound together with chains. This is clearly an act of symmetrical retaliation where Balthazar seeks to debilitate and destroy his former torturers, just as they have done to their captor. Because the reader understands Balthazar's motivations, his acts of violence do not bear the same cruelty as that of the colonisers. The violence of resistance here seems triumphant, as is demonstrated in the word 'trophées'. It would appear that we are in the realm of the familiar theme of good fighting evil, thus making the boundaries clear and distinct. However, the frenzied anger that grips Balthazar is more ferocious and direct than any violence previously encountered in the description of the middle passage in *Biblique*. His immediate reaction to the woman's death was a cry, 'il avait hurlé' (p. 64) before he is swamped by a 'sainte fureur' that leads him into violence. This same pattern of behaviour is echoed towards the end of the text when Balthazar recalls confronting the

wreckage of ‘la maison Timoléon’ where he had last seen his beloved Sarah-Anaïs-Alicia, but he cannot leave the house in case it crumbles and disappears completely ‘et c’est là que la fureur, la sainte fureur qui dynamiserait sa vie l’empoigna pour de bon [...] Il se mit à crier, à hurler’ (*BDG*, p. 622). The repeated phrases suggest that Balthazar responds to such injustice (and failure) with an uncontrollable fury. Once again, he is linked to a woman, although more obliquely in this instance. The rebel’s violence is portrayed as inevitable, understandable, visceral and gruesome, for it is only Balthazar’s violence that is described in such bloody detail. Above all, his violence is inarticulate – he cannot find the words to express what he is feeling, as is seen in his attitude to the captain as he cuts off his head ‘sans même lui dire un mot’ (*BDG*, p. 66). The rebel’s inability to express himself seems significant, implying a fury beyond words which seems a fitting response to an indescribable horror. It also echoes the words of Chamoiseau and Confiant in *Lettres créoles* who also find themselves bereft of words to describe the slave trade, asking how one *can* ‘dire la cale négrière’ (*LC*, p. 38). This level of inarticulation points to the scale of trauma the slave trade holds for the authors. As Chamoiseau states in *Texaco* when describing the *cachot* where Esternome’s father was buried alive, ‘il ne faut pas illustrer ces choses-là, afin de laisser à ceux qui les ont construites la charge totale de leur existence’ (p. 46). The authors do not want enter into the horrors in too much detail in case, by the mere process of naming, they align themselves with the violence of what happened. This struggle between the desire to remember and the refusal to replay colonial violence is one that will be explored

further in the following two sections. Here, the overriding sense that comes from this violent rebellion on board the slave ship is that while it momentarily frees the slaves, they are nevertheless quickly put in their place and are sold as slaves upon arrival on land, and so the violence displayed by the rebel does not change anything. Violence is shown to have impregnated in the slaves and is then manifested as a reaction to what they have witnessed during the middle passage, triggered by the desire for retaliation. A reproduction of original violence is outlined here, which is then transformed into mythical proportions, as is seen below.

The refusal of the creolist authors to explicitly articulate the violence that took place onboard the slave ships has been examined. Such unintelligibility again seems significant for the creolist authors in their role as writers and the following chapters will explore, in different ways, how they attempt to come to terms with the 'void' that marks the birth of their society. Eliade argues that this form of cosmogonic myth, 'becomes exemplary and consequently *repeatable*, for it serves as a model, and by the same token as a *justification*, for all human actions. In other words, a myth is a *true history* of what came to pass at the beginning of time, and one which provides the pattern for human behaviour'.⁴⁹ In the above analysis, Chamoiseau indeed establishes a mythical model that is brutal and destroys the colonised individual. Through the symbolic birth of Balthazar, Chamoiseau pinpoints the slave ship as the place of both the conception and birth

⁴⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. from French by William R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1954), p. 17. Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

of Antillean origins. The image constructed of this place of conception in the fermenting and digesting gut suggests that rather than being a natural gestation, the slave trade was completely unnatural. Moreover, this birth is depicted as one that was by and out of man and that was fertilised by death and can therefore be seen as unnatural and also monstrous. The 'birthing' process of colonisation is portrayed in this text as a monstrous machine that consumes the slaves' bodies and identities before churning them out on land to perform their next function in the machine. The violent descriptions of this greedy, digestive machine combined with Balthazar's representative conception and birth bind the two together, suggesting that the horror of the middle passage is embedded forever in the slaves and their descendants. In this way, Chamoiseau suggests that the gradual, destructive erosion of the slave's sense of self begins a near-mechanical cycle of violence, for the violence on board the ship either destroys the slave, or keeps him in an oppositional relationship with the master/coloniser. Balthazar's violence on the ship does not change the order of the power relations in the end. The sailors/colonisers have the power and are able to maintain that power despite Balthazar's violent acts. His failed rebellion symbolises the violence that consumes the slave in his sense of powerlessness and frustration, from which there seems to be no escape. He is thus trapped in a pattern of violence from which he cannot escape. The seeds of the violence that will define Antillean society are sown in him.

In a recent study, Adlai Murdoch writes that 'The story and trajectory of French Caribbean modernity are simultaneously the story of a cycle of violence

inseparable from the colonial project'.⁵⁰ This quotation identifies the existence of a 'cycle of violence' that is entirely bound to the colonial system. The next part of this chapter will explore how these violent origins manifest themselves further in the plantation system and examine the ramifications of the violence surrounding this initial 're-birth', as well as the creolist authors' literary attempts to come to terms with the brutality of their origins, examining more closely how this mechanism operates in the creolists' works.

Part 3: Unhealed Wounds: The 'Enracinement' of Violence

The first part of this chapter suggested that, for Chamoiseau, the conception of contemporary Antillean society was inseparable from the violence and injustice that began during the slave trade. In *Lettres créoles*, both Chamoiseau and Confiant emphasise this continuing condition: 'Maintenant nous nous savons Créoles. [...] Un mélange mouvant, toujours mouvant dont le point de départ est un abîme et dont l'évolution demeure imprévisible.' (p. 275). The repeated references to continual movement evoke the sea, suggesting that these writers see contemporary Antillean society as being formed in the abyss of the slave ship. This sense of repetition also implies that there is an original pattern formed here that, however fragile, is never-ending. The lack of solidity in their foundations, the lack of knowledge about where they came from and who their ancestors were (the empty *abîme* is all they know of their origins) are undoubtedly the reasons why the creolist authors use the Antillean islands as the setting for most of their

⁵⁰ H. Adlai Murdoch, *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel* (Gainesville: University Press Florida, 2001), p.2.

work. These islands, regardless of the horrors that took place upon it, are still more physically substantial than is the *abîme* of the middle passage.

Upon arrival on the plantations, the violence that began on the slave ships is intensified in the new lives of the slaves. The explicit link between the middle passage and the plantation is analysed by Milne, who highlights the paradox between the plantation as a place of production where food is cultivated and its oppressive, sterile nature (Milne, 'Metaphor and Memory', p. 92). For Milne, the plantation is thus a sterile machine that establishes a model of violence. However, Mary Gallagher sees the plantation as a productive space for the creolist authors in the sense that it produces a culture (and the important figure of the *conteur*, analysed in Chapter 2 and 5) and is also the site of the first resistance against their enslavement.⁵¹ Gallagher suggests that it is precisely the human contact enforced by the plantation that unwittingly leads to this emergence and that is thus the 'cradle of créolité' (*Soundings in French Caribbean Writing*, p. 167). The theoretical and fictional writings of Confiant and Chamoiseau allow for both interpretations. In *Lettres créoles*, the creolist authors argue that the plantation nevertheless creates *something*, almost despite itself:

Cet outil de conquête et de défrichement, cette machine à exploiter et à enrichir (qui ne s'était jamais voulu d'enracinement), avait développé un élément qu'aucun de ses protagonistes n'avait pressenti ni n'avait désiré: *une culture*. (LC, p. 49)

⁵¹ For the plantation is also where the cultural ruse and resistance so closely associated with Creole culture began (Gallagher, *Soundings in French Caribbean Writing*, pp. 167-168).

The plantation can be viewed as an economic and social machine that stifles the individual and is un-nurturing in its intentions. Yet despite this oppression, human (Creole) ingenuity generates a cultural melting pot, leading to creation even in the worst adversity. Gallagher sees the plantation as the primary locus of Creole culture. (Indeed, she suggests that since the demise of the plantation era, Creole culture has lost its focus in a sense, leading to a ‘gigantic cultural debacle’).⁵² The above quotation from *Lettres créoles* suggests that from the ambiguities and brutality a culture emerges against all odds. The notion of *enracinement* here highlights that it is a model that is imposed on the land, an artificial set-up.⁵³ The description of the plantation system as a ‘machine’ – i.e. an apparatus that functions to produce a specific outcome – is reinforced; the slaves are the necessary cogs in the perpetual machine. The emergence of a human culture does not fit into this economic process. The word ‘culture’ is key here, striking a parallel with the notion of the cultivation of the sugar cane fields. In other words, while in human terms the cultivation of cash crops is sterilising and bears nothing, Creole culture stimulates the fertile growth of *créolité* and so sustains the slaves in more abstract ways, for example in the form of the *conte créole*. The latter is a clandestine culture, parallel and different to the official ‘culture’ of the sugar cane. Through close textual analysis, this next part will examine how the creolist authors suggest that the violence of the plantation

⁵² Mary Gallagher, ‘Whence and whither the French Caribbean ‘créolité’ movement?’, *ASCALF*, 9 (1994), 3-18 (p. 7). Further references to this article are given after quotations in the text

⁵³ The significance of ‘enracinement’ and all its associated metaphors of planting and embedding roots will be fully examined in the third chapter. Here, it draws attention to the creolist authors’ belief in a Creole culture that is not imposed upon them but that *belongs* to the Antilles.

system continues to haunt and even structure elements of contemporary Antillean society. Their fiction implies that the cruel rigidity of the plantation structure and its racist hierarchy continues to structure contemporary Antillean society in such a way that a model of human violence is perpetuated.

Mary Gallagher describes how most French Caribbean authors write about the ‘scars engraved upon a collective psyche’ (‘Whence and whither the French Caribbean’, p. 4) that have been caused by the slave trade and subsequent treatment on the plantations. In this part, I will explore how the creolist authors expose these ‘scars’ and identify the plantation system as a destructive human model that continues to corrupt contemporary Antillean society. In their texts, Chamoiseau and Confiant rarely use the plantation as a specific setting, with the exception of Confiant’s trilogy – *Commandeur du sucre*, *Régisseur du rhum* and *la Dissidence*⁵⁴ – and Chamoiseau’s *L’Esclave et le vieil homme* (1997). Despite this lack of explicit reference, much of their writing is concerned with the impact of plantation culture, as the following analysis demonstrates.

In the opening pages of *L’Esclave vieil homme et le molosse*, Chamoiseau describes the arrival of the African slaves on Antillean soil: ‘Nullement des hommes, mais de lentes processions de chairs défaites, maquillées d’huile et de vinaigre [qui] ressemblent mieux à des fermentations qu’à des personnes vivantes’ (*EVHM*, p. 21). This image creates an overwhelming sense of a ‘*déshumain grandiose*’ (*EVHM*, p. 22) that recalls the terrible circumstances of

⁵⁴ *Commandeur du sucre* (Paris: Folio, 1994); *Régisseur du rhum* (Paris: Ecriture, 1999); *La Dissidence* (Paris: Ecriture, 2002). Future quotations from *Commandeur* will be referenced as CS.

the middle passage. In other words, the complete process of dehumanisation that began on the slave ships continues upon arrival of the plantation. Just as the violence of the middle passage in *Biblique* is implied by Chamoiseau, in this novel, the violence that takes place in the ‘habitation’ is evoked in a subtle way. The story recounts the escape of the anonymous *esclave vieil homme* from the ‘habitation’. Importantly, this bid for freedom is not *marronnage* (‘Il décide donc de s’en aller, non pas de marronner, mais d’aller’ [EVHM, p. 54]), suggesting that – for Chamoiseau – this action is a positive decision and is not an attempt to flee or escape.⁵⁵ The *béké* sends his ferocious large dog, the *molosse*, after the slave and the narrative follows the chase and the eventual confrontation of the two in the forest, away from both the ‘habitation’ and the *béké*. This distance is significant, implying that the struggle somehow excludes the *béké*. I would argue that the reason for this is due to the undercurrent of violence that exists between the old slave and the dog from the first moment they set eyes on each other:

L’esclave vieil homme et le molosse s’étaient regardés. Le molosse avait tout là-même aboyé. Et même plus qu’aboyé, il s’était débondé en enragée terrible, baveuse, avec le poil catastrophée telle une crinière de lion.

(EVHM, pp. 37-38)

Although we are not told what passes between the two, the violence of the dog’s reaction suggests that there is a more complex reason than that given by the *béké*,

⁵⁵ In *Lettres créoles*, Chamoiseau and Confiant consider the ‘ambivalent’ situation of the slave and of the ‘nègre marron’ to be similar, arguing that both are obliged to compromise. Although the ‘nègre marron’ escapes. ‘[il] se voit obligé d’accepter bien des termes de ce nouvel ordre de l’existence’ (pp. 48-49) and therefore cannot be seen as truly liberated from the constraints of the plantation in the eyes of the creolist authors.

‘que la chaire noire lui ouvrait l’appetit’ (*EVHM*, p. 38). We are also not told of the old slave’s response, as his thoughts remain impenetrable. However, a few pages later the narrator informs us that although the slave never stops in front of the dog’s cage, unnoticed by anyone, he walks the length of the cage ‘Et-caetera de fois par jour, sans zieuter le molosse’ (p. 44). Moreover, none of the others notice that in the presence of the slave, the dog in turn ‘se faisait encore plus attentive, un tac plus à l’aguet, une maille mieux à l’affût’ (p. 45). It is still not clear what is happening between the two but there is nevertheless a sense of tension, described as an ‘affrontement [qui] dura des mois durant’ (p. 45) which reinforces the notion of conflict and imminent violence. It also seems significant that this slave’s reaction to the *molosse* is different to the other slaves: he does not display the same fear. Indeed, if anything, the slave seems to be drawn towards the cage of the dog whereas the others go out of their way to avoid it (‘on évitait de passer là’ [p. 44]).

The reason provided for this strange feeling of repulsion and attraction can be traced back to the original violence. We know that the violence of the *molosse* stems directly from the journey on the slave ship: ‘Le molosse était un monstre car il avait connue cette effondrée-là’ (p. 34). Although we do not know for sure whether the slave had known the slave ship (‘Il ne savait plus s’il était né sur l’Habitation ou s’il avait connu cette traversée en cale’ [p. 37]), whenever he sees the arrival of one of the ships, its movement in the water ‘débusquait en lui un roulis primordial’ (p. 37). This portrayal of the physical impact of the ship on the slave implies firstly that even for those Antilleans who did not experience the

middle passage, an imagined memory of its horror has led it to becoming the collective birthplace of Antilleans: a shared original violence that is the *roulis primordial*. Secondly, however, the apparent inability of the slave to remember his place of birth suggests that the experience on the slave ship and in the plantation is a blurred memory, merging into one indistinct episode. Therefore the violence of the slave ship seems indistinguishable from the violence of the plantation and the impression of an overarching process of dehumanisation is created. The ‘machine’ that began on the ship appears to continue working in the plantation. Such an image is invoked directly by Chamoiseau, the narrator describes how the *béké* would watch the old slave working, ‘Parfois même, le regard attentif du Maître ne le distingue pas du bloc des machines; elles semblent aller seules’ (*EVHM*, p. 23). Here, for this brief moment, the slave and the machine become interchangeable, which dehumanises the slave completely and recalls the indifferent attitude of the sailors towards the slaves in *Biblique*. There is no chance of this happening between the *molosse* and the old slave. Regardless of whether the slave was born in the Habitation or whether he had indeed experienced the middle passage, the slave’s attraction comes from an acknowledgement – even a recognition of a shared experience:

Il retrouve dans le molosse la catastrophe qui l’habite [...] ce bouillonnement de violences, de dégoûts, de désirs, d’impossibles: ce magma qui s’exalte dans l’Habitation et qui le constitue au plus vital de son nombril. Et le molosse est aussi comme cela. Mais dans l’impressionnante férocité de l’animal, cette catastrophe a pris

convergence: elle s'est transformée en une foi aveugle capable de maîtriser ce trouble né du bateau. (*EVHM*, p. 50)

The repetition of the word *catastrophe* indicates the extent of the violence 'inhabiting' both man and dog and also evokes a certain inability to define it fully. Its description as a *bouillonnement* adds to the sense of a climactic violence, as if this 'magma' will bubble over and explode at any point. The use of unusual plurals (of *violences*, *dégoûts* and so forth) suggests that the 'magma' is composed of and strengthened by a multitude of complex and unidentifiable elements – a little like Antillean society itself – and gives it a strength. In other words, there is no singular violence that haunts the slave but instead many different violence(s). The paragraphs above reinforce the connection that Chamoiseau makes between the original violence of the middle passage and the violence on the plantations. This is emphasised here in the description of the 'trouble né du bateau', which pinpoints the origins of the *catastrophe* in the slave ship explicitly. While the 'magma' of indefinable violences 's'exhalte' from the plantation, the mention of the *nombril* also connects the slave to his origins, i.e. the middle passage. The shared *catastrophe* is recognised by each but in the case of the *molosse*, it is somehow transformed into something terrible, a brutality that seems more tangibly violent and visible than its manifestation by the slave. Nevertheless, the *molosse* is 'le double souffrant de l'esclave' (*EVHM*, p. 51), implying that both suffer from the trauma of the middle passage and that the memory of its horror has a lasting impact.

It is only outside the plantation that both the slave and the dog are able to overcome the *catastrophe* of the original violence that inhabits them. This implies that any means of coming to terms with the violence of the past is not possible within the confines of the plantation. In *L'Esclave vieil homme*, it is in the heart of the forest that both find some form of salvation in the form of the enormous *pierre de volcan*, that prevents both from continuing their journey. The slave reaches the stone, where he is filled with strange sensations and an apparent acceptance of his fate, 'J'ai atteint une nervure d'alliance entre la mort et la vie, victoire et défaite' (*EVHM*, p. 130) and where he finds his refuge. He knows he can go no further but does not feel despair, 'Je n'ai pas peur. Je n'éprouve même pas le désir de me battre' (p. 132). The reader is left with the impression that the slave has finally been freed from the torment of his life. When the *molosse* eventually comes across the slave, 'sa proie était mêlée à une Pierre où grouillaient une myriade de peuples, de voix, de souffrances, de clameurs' (*EVHM*, p. 136). For the first time in his pursuit, the dog seems to become aware of something other than his 'prey'. Of course, as Chamoiseau informs us, the peoples that inhabit this stone are the Amerindian ancestors, but they nevertheless seem to touch a chord with the *molosse*. Whatever the specific effect of the voices on the dog, he does not maul his 'prey' but instead licks him, unable to taste anything. It appears that the slave has been assimilated into the rock and become one of the many voices heard by the animal. And so there has been a dramatic change: as the dog makes his way back, the *béké* is able to see this transformation physically, 'Il avait lâché un tueur, lui revenait un animal trop serein et trop

calme' (*EVHM*, p. 137). The violence 'born' from the 'trouble' of the slave ship has thus disappeared from the *molosse*, and all that remains is a sense of peace. This ending links the original violence and the violence on the plantation through the (imagined) experience of both 'characters' in the ship's hold. Although the slave's peace is only to be found in death, and the *molosse* returns to the *béké* defeated in the sense that he is no longer fit for battle, both the slave and the *molosse* are represented as having come to terms with the violence that has inhabited them throughout their lives on the plantation.

An analysis of Confiant's novel *Nuée ardente* points to a similar pattern of violence that is linked to the original violence and where the juxtaposition of birth and death also occurs, although in a less direct way than the example explored above.⁵⁶ The publication of *Nuée ardente* coincided with the centenary of the eruption of the volcano Mont Pelé and is set in the few months before the eruption.⁵⁷ The text follows the increasingly obvious signs of volcanic movement (the ash floating down like snow, the black cloud eclipsing the sun, rivers of lava and so forth) and interweaves these signs with the lives of the different strata of Saint Pierre society (the *mulâtre* poet, the brothel owner, the plantation owner, the exploited mistress of the *béké*, etc.). Confiant uses the imminent eruption of the volcano to lead the narrative until both finally reach a climactic, cathartic

⁵⁶ *Nuée ardente* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2000). Future quotations from this novel will be referenced as *Nu A*.

⁵⁷ The term 'Nuée ardente' is defined in *Le Robert* as 'amas de gaz, de vapeur, de'eau, de cendres, expulsé lors d'une eruption volcanique de type péléen'. Its use as the title of the novel places a great emphasis on the symbolic and literal importance of the volcanic eruption for Confiant.

end.⁵⁸ Through the voice of the old slave Lafrique Guinée, he suggests that the volcano's eruption is the land's revenge for the treachery of the *nègres* who have abandoned their Creole roots in their embrace of French culture. Before the eruption, Saint-Pierre was considered to be the capital of the island, where many of the former slaves and *mulâtres* fled after Abolition. In their attempt to forget the horrors of their previous existence, the freed slaves throw themselves into a life of pleasure and debauchery. It is this that horrifies Lafrique, a sort of Antillean Cassandra who tries to inform the other *nègres* of the fate that awaits them but who is destined to be ignored. The combination of his refusal to assimilate into Antillean society alongside the other *nègres* and his outrage at their behaviour assign him a moral high ground that strengthens his point of view. Lafrique berates the *nègres*, accusing them of consorting 'comme des rats dans les rues maculées de vomissures blanchâtres' (*NuA*, p. 188). This grotesque image creates a sense of the corruption in the town, seemingly caused by the *nègres*' collusion with the whites and the *mulâtres*, whose description as 'vomissures blanchâtres' and as 'rats' associate them with disease and infection. The word 'maculées', usually used to describe blood, is another clue to the reader of impending violent deaths. For the streets, which will soon be flowing with the lava from the volcano are almost in need of a purging force, to rid the town of its

⁵⁸ Michael J. Dash traces the emergence of apocalyptic thought in French Caribbean writing using the metaphor of 'unexploded volcanoes' to describe its current tensions ('Postcolonial Eccentricities: Francophone Caribbean Literature and the *fin de siècle*', in *Francophone Caribbean Today: Literature, Language, and Culture*, ed. Gertrud Aub-Buscher & Beverly Ormerod Noakes (Mona, Jamaica: The University of West Indies Press, 2003), pp. 33-44 (p. 36). Yet in Confiant's novel the volcano does explode, suggesting perhaps that some of the tension built-up is beginning to release itself after all.

innate rottenness. In the face of the impending explosion, Lafrique gleefully harangues his fellow *nègres* Martinicans:

Saint-Pierre est une ville maudite, braillait-il! Son opulence s'est bâtie sur la sueur de nos ancêtres [...] L'enrageaison du volcan sera notre vengeance et il ne laissera pas un mur debout. (*NuA*, p. 188)

The above quotation also gives the impression of the fragility of Saint-Pierre, built on the sweat of the slave ancestors. Confiant thus makes a direct link between the people's behaviour and the 'rage' of the volcano, which is anthropomorphised. The attribution of anger to the volcano is then assumed by Lafrique to be a revenge that will be carried out on the behalf of the *nègres*, as 'notre vengeance'.

This link between the natural, one-off violence and the colonial system is made even more explicit in the text through the *planteur* Louis de Saint-Jorre who suggests that the natural eruption – a physical event – acts as a trigger for a significant historical event:

[E]n trois cent ans de présence *civilisée* dans ce pays, il n'y a eu en tout et pour tout que deux éruptions volcaniques et chacune d'elles a préfiguré une catastrophe sociale ou lui a fait suite. (*NuA*, p.28, my emphasis)

The first eruption occurred just before the first Abolition of slavery, and the second, just after the final Abolition. The volcanic eruption therefore acts as a

warning device, prefiguring some sort of cataclysmic event in Antillean society but one that is related to the original violence.

In his *dernière litanie*, Lafrique refers directly to the violence of the middle passage, asking rhetorically ‘qui m’a fait entendre le roulis du bateau charroyeur de nègres esclaves?’ (*NuA*, p. 236) before describing his vision of the ships’ holds. Like the old slave in *L’Esclave vieil homme*, we do not know for sure whether Lafrique was brought over from Africa (although his name suggests a close link), but he too is able to imagine its horror and it seems to inhabit him. The suffering of his ancestors during the middle passage continues into the plantations, as the opening words of Lafrique’s *litanie* imply:

Quand je devire sur la trace de ma génération, il n’y a que bruit de chaînes, claquements de fouet sur les dos nus, cris et sang. (*NuA*, p. 236)

He tells us that the ‘douze premières années’ (p. 237) of his life were spent in the time of slavery, i.e. on the plantation. The violence of his treatment there has clearly left an indelible trace, filling his head with the sounds of chains and whips. Confiant does not describe at length the brutality inflicted upon Lafrique, but the images conjured up by these words force the reader to imagine the detail. What is clear is that unlike the other *nègres*, he is not blind to the ancestors and to the horrors of the past, but instead the sounds of the suffering of the past inhabit/haunt his mind, ‘et c’est pourquoi la peur du volcan qui s’apprête à cracher sa lave n’habite pas mon âme’ (*NuA*, p. 236). Through Lafrique’s words, the violence of the volcano is set up in contrast with the violence of the past. He

describes the volcano as ‘le seul lieu inviolé de cette terre de veuleries, de crimes impunis, d’abominations de toutes sortes et d’insignifiance’ (*NuA*, p. 244). The image of the volcano as the only place untouched by the horrors of history implies that the land is innocent but that the crimes committed upon it have become too much to bear. Such an image is effective, suggesting that the violence is a physical weight bearing down on the land until it has to explode. This indicates the extent of the colonial violence that is contrasted here with the comparative ‘purity’ of the land, as if it has also been raped by brutality of colonialism. I return to the creolists’ representation of nature in Chapter 3, but in the meantime will focus on the fact that the violence of the volcano seems here to be portrayed as a righteous one. The volcanic eruption in the narrative is depicted as a direct response to colonial violence. It is linked to the violence of the plantation but in a less direct way than the violent relationship between the *molosse* and the old slave in *L’Esclave vieil homme et le molosse*.

The eruption of the volcano is described by Confiant in apocalyptic terms. Browning’s Oxford Dictionary of the Bible provides the following definition of the word ‘apocalyptic’:

[It] is the fervent hope of a future salvation at the end of the current experience of national humiliation and suffering [...] It reflects a despair

of historical process and predicts catastrophic cosmic upheavals [...] It is a literature of hope and consolation.⁵⁹

Browning's definition here implies that the Apocalypse occurs during a point of crisis, a defining moment in any given society where some drastic form of revolution is necessary for that society to survive. Such a definition seems to describe accurately the way in which the volcano is represented in *Nuée ardente*. The volcano is used in two ways by Confiant – firstly, the climax towards its eruption acts loosely as a narrative structure and secondly, the various *litanies* of Lafrique frame it in apocalyptic terms. Another critic, Tina Pippin states that the 'rhetoric of the Apocalypse, intends both a 'real' crisis in the 'real' world and its solution in the fictive world'.⁶⁰ This is also an apt description of how Confiant depicts the eruption – as a way of 'solving' the excessive behaviour of the *mulâtres* and the *blancs* in Saint-Pierre, and a means of offering a new beginning to the *nègres*. Confiant here concentrates on the violent explosion, the fiery retribution of the land. He seems to prefer this imagery, leaving to one side the gas which is less dramatic, less cathartic. In this way, the volcanic eruption can be read as the chance of a new beginning for Martinicans, purged of the horrors of colonialism.

This sense of a beginning is reinforced by numerous suggestions that the eruption of the volcano is an experience of birth. For example, upon seeing the

⁵⁹ W.R.F. Browning, *Oxford Dictionary of the Bible* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 20.

⁶⁰ Death and Desire: *The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 120.

initial explosion, one of the prison guardians murmurs ‘On dirait un monstre en train d’accoucher!’ (*NuA*, p. 286). Some pages later, the eruption is described in similar terms, ‘L’enfantement est brutal. La parturiente voit son ventre se fendre en deux de bas en haut avant d’éjecter un immense champignon blanc qui inflige une calotte au ciel. Le soleil s’eteint net’ (*NuA*, p. 297). These direct comparisons between the volcanic eruption and the process of birth appear frequently and indicate to the reader that Confiant uses the volcano as a symbol for possible rebirth for Martinican people. The close, almost contradictory, image of the volcano as both apocalypse and rebirth evokes Chamoiseau’s depiction of the *traite*, analysed in the first section of this chapter. We are once again returning to the importance of origins – and their violence. In *Nuée*, however, the volcano represents the Apocalypse in a more positive, almost purifying, way, unlike the explosive violence of the *traite*. Confiant’s focus is upon the explosion – the moment of revenge against the ‘vomissures blanchâtres’ that he describes earlier. The ‘rebirth’ only occurs at the very end of the text, after the dramatic, apocalyptic scene. The suggestion is that there is only a possibility of rebirth if the violence of the past is wiped out. However, Balthazar’s multiple births in *Biblique*, as well as the symbolic (re-)birth of the slave in the forest in *L’Esclave*, are much less concerned with violence, or indeed with wiping out the past completely. Instead, Chamoiseau implies that in order to be in some way reconciled with the violence of the middle passage and of the plantation, acceptance is necessary rather than an additional apocalyptic violence. However, whatever possibilities of an Antillean future liberated from the shackles of the

violent past are implied in these new beginnings, the pattern of violence and death is always present. This suggests, as the following analysis implies, that the machine seems destined to continue.

The fictional writings of the creolist authors create the impression that violence is omnipresent in Antillean society and suggest, through their repeated representations of it, that this violence stems directly from the brutalities of colonialism and the hierarchical and unjust system that it established. The textual examples that will be explored below are each centred on a violent clash between the *nègres* and the *békés* and metropolitan authorities, seen from the *nègres*' perspective. In Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, the brutal confrontation takes place in the unsettled period around Abolition. In *L'Allée des soupirs* Confiant, on the other hand, fictionalises demonstrations that took place in Fort-de-France some ten years after departmentalisation. I will compare and contrast the two examples, charting how the violent oppression of the *nègres* is established by the authors and what ramifications this has on the sense of self that has already been so eroded during the middle passage.

The narrative in *Texaco* loosely follows the story of Marie-Sophie, detailing her struggles with the authorities in her quest to keep the *quartier* of Texaco standing. This central story is composed of multiple *histoires* that interlink to form an overall *Histoire* of Martinique from the time of slavery until the present day.⁶¹ This process of interweaving makes the reader aware of the

⁶¹ The plural nature of a version of History that can encompass all the different fragments of Antillean society is one of the key notions of *créolité*. The creolist authors emphasise its plural,

many different 'traces' and components that have formed Marie-Sophie, among which is the pattern of violence and resistance that runs through Martinican History from the time of slavery onwards. In the following episode, Esternome, Marie-Sophie's father (through the 'remembered' words of Marie-Sophie) describes *l'En-ville* (Saint-Pierre) during the period of unrest surrounding the Abolition of slavery. Everyone has come down from the plantations and is out on the streets in support of a man who is being sent to jail and so Pory-Papy, 'le plus populaire des conseillers municipaux' (T, p. 113), decides to liberate him. As the town 'coulait dans un vieux carnaval' (p. 113), the atmosphere begins to degenerate and the crowd start throwing stones and insulting *les blancs* (the sailors and the police): 'Ceux-là, oublieux des patiences, tirèrent bo bo bo à la première roche qui leur fut envoyée. Sang. Sang. Os pétés. Têtes percées. Cervelles essaimées à la ronde' (p. 114). There is an orality present here that, coupled with the onomatopoeic 'bo bo bo', seems to reconstruct the sound of the gunfire as the crowds are fired on. The word also recalls the children's word *bo-bo*, evoking pain but from a young, innocent perspective. Such simple images convey confusion and violence, like the snapshots 'Sang. Sang'. This childlike perception creates a sense of Esternome's difficulty of fully articulating his thoughts and verbalising what he is seeing. The extremely violent picture of the brains spattering is expressed in very simple language. The lack of active verbs emphasises the crowd's vulnerability, constructing them as passive

multiple nature by creating an image of its interwoven texture, stating that, 'Notre Histoire est une tresse d'histoires' (*Eloge*, p. 26), a notion that is first outlined by Glissant in *Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981). The word 'Histoire' therefore incorporates the many individual stories that form the grand, collective narrative of History.

victims. This impression is emphasised by the cruel timing of the bloodshed. Just as the slaves are on the brink of freedom, the crushing force of the colonial power swiftly obliterates the earlier celebrations. This makes the *nègres* appear all the more innocent and even naïve for believing that *les Blancs* would ever liberate them. And so, in this contrast between the violent brutality of the *Blancs*, or the police representatives of the state's authority, and the childish innocence of the *nègres*, the hierarchy of the plantation remains intact in the *En-ville*.

The haziness of the tone is undoubtedly created because Esternome cannot give precise details.⁶² For example, 'Les békés se mirent à nous fusiller. Ou alors un seul d'entre eux tira. Il y eut un cri. Puis un sang. Ou une odeur de sang. Alors tout fut du feu [...] Ce fut une nuit d'enfer.' (p. 115). This lack of detail about what actually happened is attributed to Esternome's inability to remember fully the details of the night's events states that 'Mon papa Esternome ne s'en rappela jamais les détails' (p. 115). However, it also creates a sense that the events were so tumultuous that they cannot be recalled in any coherent form and such a chaotic image of violence conveys its absurdity, and pointlessness. Finally, at the end of this 'nuit d'enfer', 'cette violence s'éteignit en pleine nuit, vidée par on ne sait quel égout' (p. 115). The image of violence disappearing down the sewage drain implies sordidness, as if its presence is sullyng the streets of Saint-Pierre. Yet it also creates the image of violence as a liquid that is able to permeate into every pore of Antillean life. This metaphor evokes the fluidity but also the power

⁶² The haziness of the tone creates a similar sensation for the reader, who feels that s/he is equally unable to see clearly what is going on. This could be a deliberate ploy, making the reader experience that same 'fogginess' that Antilleans are faced with when they attempt to understand their past, which is often opaque and glossed over by the coloniser's version.

of the sea, and the violent journey across the water that brought the slaves to the islands in the first place, suggesting that memories of the slave trade are never far away, hovering underneath the surface of Antillean society. In this riot, everyone is involved (with the exception of Esternome, who is too busy trying to protect his beloved Ninon) and they are all implicated – *békés, mulâtres, nègres, nègres-marrons*. This suggests, as we saw in the previous section, that the violence is an inevitable part of the colonial process, an almost omnipresent force that can be triggered by a mere ‘une odeur de sang’.

Confiant’s *L’Allée des soupirs* begins with a scene that is very similar to the one examined in *Texaco*. Here, metropolitan forces inflict a similar violence on a rioting crowd, although the novel is set almost 100 years later, during the riots of 1959.⁶³ The text begins with the young, romantic Ancinelle rushing to meet her secret lover, the *instituteur* Monsieur Jean. At this point the narrative is recounted from Ancinelle’s perspective; her naivety and innocence mean that the reader is more aware than she is about what is happening, which makes the violence seem all the more brutal.⁶⁴ Initially, all she can think of is how late she will be for Monsieur Jean, although she still wonders why the men in the Savane do not give her their usual wolf whistles, and why they are filled with such

⁶³ Armand Nicolas, vol. 3, p. 180 gives specific details of the riots that were triggered by a dispute between a metropolitan motorist and a Martinican scooterist. These riots, mainly involving young people, continued intermittently throughout the 60s and 70s and are seen by Nicolas as a sign of the failure of *départementalisation*.

⁶⁴ However, after this episode, Ancinelle’s innocence is lost and she is caught up in the excitement of the violence, seeing the rebels as heroes and asks Monsieur Jean, ‘Pourquoi on a tout fait pour étouffer la colère du peuple?’ (AS, p. 69). The riots seemed to have sparked a political awareness in her yet Monsieur Jean does not even hear her speak. His refusal to hear her suggests that this older male feels threatened by this younger, increasingly politicised female. His fear would be that the more educated she becomes, the less she will idolise him and he will be deprived of his role.

‘enrageaison’ (p.16), as they pour out from every corner onto the street.⁶⁵

Although they are immediately clear to the reader, we are told that she does not understand their taunts of ‘Nous allons vous exterminer’ (p. 16) and ‘Messieurs les Blancs, gare à vous, foutre!’ (AS, p. 16). This ‘gap’ between the tension that is building up around her and her apparent unawareness of it creates an additional tension for the reader. The anger of the men in the square is being voiced loudly and one of them is tapping on an empty paint pot ‘un rythme de bel-air’ (p. 16). The combination of the (Creole) music and the shouts seems to be leading up to a violent climax yet still ‘la jeune femme ne comprenait pas ce qui se déroulait là sous ses yeux’ (p. 16). Nevertheless, Ancinelle is obviously terrified, as her physical responses indicate: ‘Elle demeura plantée [...] tout-à-faiblement incapable de former deux mots et quatre paroles sur ses lèvres. Elle s’aperçut soudain que les poils de ses bras s’étaient hérissés et que son coeur chamadait’ (AS, p. 16). Her inability to pronounce a single word conveys her fear – the sense of paralysis and numbness indicates the body’s response to a frightening event. It also makes her appear fragile and vulnerable and this, combined with her lack of understanding of the events unfurling around her, makes her seem especially defenceless. We know that she feels fear because of her body’s instinctive reaction to defend itself, indicated in the raised hairs of her arm.

Ancinelle’s physical reaction seems a normal response to being caught up in a riot that she does not understand. Yet her mental response is very different and at

⁶⁵ This is exactly the same as the build-up to the riot that occurs in *Texaco* – creating a sense of the situation spiralling out of control and this build-up to violence is matched by the increasing collective fury of the people thus reinforcing the climactic tone.

this point the narrative veers off into Ancinelle's memories – of her aunt Philomène and above all of Monsieur Jean, diverting the reader for several pages away from the build-up to violence. She recalls the lead-up to her first meeting with him. This detour is part of a continual blurring of time in the narrative between the past and the present.⁶⁶ In this instance, it is a technique that, like Esternome's account of the riot in Saint-Pierre, renders the entire episode hazy, thus creating a sense of the chaos that surrounds Ancinelle. Like Esternome, her priority lies elsewhere. It seems significant that these two characters are blind to the detail of History in the making because they are so preoccupied with their own *histoire (d'amour)*, reflecting – like the *nègres aveugles* berated by Lafrique Guinée in *Nuée ardente* – the blindness of these Antilleans to their own situation.

The happiness Ancinelle feels in remembering her past helps her cope with the situation but it also makes the sudden return to the violence of the riot particularly brutal and intense. Again, as in Chamoiseau's text, the violence itself is not detailed explicitly at length but instead it is through Ancinelle's senses that the reader absorbs what is happening. Just when she is wondering what is going to happen in her *rendez-vous* with Monsieur Jean, 'un manifestant venait d'allumer un feu dans un assemblage de pneus usagés' (p. 24). The word 'manifestant' makes it clear that this is a riot, but instead Ancinelle has the impression 'd'être projetée dans un rêve de mauvais augure' (p. 24). She is still

⁶⁶ This lack of linearity is a typical technique of the creolist authors, one that can be related back to the *conteur*. As Ralph Ludwig explains, 'C'est ainsi que la parole du conteur créole n'est parfois 'pas claire' et que, dans la littérature antillaise, sur le plan de la stratégie de l'écriture, la causalité fait place à l'association' in 'Ecrire la parole de nuit', in *Ecrire la 'parole de nuit': la nouvelle littérature antillaise*, ed. Ralph Ludwig (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 13-25 (p. 19).

unaware of everything else around her and appears caught in a nightmare where she is helpless and passive, as the verb ‘projetée’ suggests. Perhaps this is why both extracts are described in such hazy terms, conveying the blurriness of Ancinelle’s and Esternome’s minds. They are so desperate to focus on their love (which, to make matters worse, turns out to be one-sided: Monsieur Jean uses the same lines on other women and Ninon abandons Esternome for a musician *Enville*) because it represents an escape from the misery of their daily existences and gives them a reason to live.

In *L’Allée*, the description of the fire and smoke and ‘une odeur âcre’ heightens the hazy sensation we have just examined, as if the surrounding smoky chaos corresponds to Ancinelle’s initial inability to absorb the events around her. However neither this, nor the ‘cris des révoltés’ which ‘lui tambourinaient les tempes’ (p. 25), seems to make Ancinelle more aware, and so she does not hear the bullet whistling towards her: ‘En un battement d’yeux, elle bascule dans la souffrance et la demi-conscience mêlées. Elle sentit ses os lui rentrer dans la chair et comme une vive brûlure au ventre’. (p. 25). The suddenness of her pain forces her to snap out of her daydreaming and to focus on her *souffrance*, as the image of her bones crumpling conveys. There seems to be no specific reason for her injury, and the repeated emphasis of her innocence and ignorance make it even crueler. She drifts back into her dream world and as her body hits the pavement she seems to find peace and comfort, imagining that she is in the arms of Monsieur Jean until:

Soudain une violente douleur: un pied botté lui écrasa la poitrine, le cou, puis les cinq doigts de sa main gauche. Une voix d'Européen hurla:

“Au fond là-bas! Tirez dans le tas, les gars, feu à volonté, nom de Dieu!”

(p. 26)

Here the physical crushing of Ancinelle's chest and throat represents the collective oppression of Antilleans, suggesting that the metropolitan French authorities are stifling their voices, rendering Antilleans literally speechless. Similarly, her crushed hand prevents her from fighting back and so she is forced further into a passive role. The cruelty of the nameless European is juxtaposed with Ancinelle's innocent dreams of love. He does not even notice that he is trampling on her, suggesting that in his enthusiasm to shoot, all the dead and wounded around him have become invisible, recalling the indifference of the sailors in the ship's hold in *Biblique*. Furthermore, his instructions to the other police to shoot at will, 'feu à volonté', convey the casual brutality of the police where each man is given the power to do as he pleases. These words act as a condemnation of the action of the policemen, an impression that is intensified because this is a fictionalised account of real events. The behaviour of the 'Européen' is depicted by Confiant as brutal and insensitive, with no justification that he, nor the police to whom he gives orders, are acting in self-defence. The indifference of the policemen is further implied in their reference to the crowd as 'le tas', which dehumanises them, again recalling the dehumanisation of the slaves during the middle passage as it is represented in *Biblique*.

The riots in *Texaco* and *L'Allée des soupirs* bear many similarities, yet they take place more than a hundred years apart. Within that period of time much has happened in Martinican History, with the island changing status from a colony to a *département*. These political changes have had significant ramifications, and this fact makes the similarities especially surprising. Despite massive changes to Antillean society brought about by external forces, its internal social and political landscape remains the same. The similar attitude of Esternome and Ancinelle towards the riot is clear: they are much more interested in going about their love lives and pursuing what is most important to them than getting involved in the making of History. Both of them are innocently caught up in these events: they have no desire to be there. Both Chamoiseau and Confiant have emphasised the innocence of their characters throughout the descriptions of the violence that reigns around them, but in which they are not directly involved. They are thus seen as passive victims at the hands of the Europeans, just as their slave ancestors were at the mercy of the European colonisers several centuries previously. Neither Ancinelle nor Esternome are shown as active agents of their own *histoires*. The authors suggest that as long as the Europeans are in control, Antilleans will remain disempowered and unable to take control of their own lives.

The injustices of the colonial system centre on the oppression and exploitation of one group of people for the profit of another. As we shall see further on, Chamoiseau and Confiant indicate that History has always been understood as being removed from everyday Antilleans. Even at the time of

Abolition, it was Europeans such as Schoelcher who are represented as having brought about the freedom of the slaves.⁶⁷ This disempowerment of the former slaves is a psychological form of violence that acts as a powerfully effective oppression. The texts seem to parallel this notion with portrayals of physical violence. What is important here is that, for the *nègres*, the situation never improves. In *Texaco*, the *mulâtre* Bissette (significantly one of the key players in the Abolition of slavery) tries to persuade the slaves that things will change, and his frustration is visible. With the benefit of hindsight, Esternome is able to provide an explanation for political apathy:

Il [le mulâtre politisé] voulait qu'on réponde *C'est de l'Histoire en marche*, ce que tout le monde répondait, sauf ce délirant de Théodorus qui juste avant l'ultime délire brailla: Quelle Histoire, mais quelle histoire? Où sont les nègres là-dedans? (*T*, p. 85)

The political *mulâtre* is clearly excited by the sense of making History and wants his fellow Martinicans to be caught up in the drama of it all, moved by the scale of the political changes that are taking place. Although everyone, except for Theodorus (who is a white man) does respond in the desired way, the insertion of 'voulait qu'on' suggests that they are doing so simply to please the *mulâtre*, rather than from any zeal of their own. Théodorus' lone voice therefore seems more sincere than the response of the others. Although the collective group dismiss him as a *délirant*, Esternome – with the benefit of hindsight – is now able

⁶⁷ For a detailed account of Victor Schoelcher's role in the abolition see Armand Nicolas, vol. I, pp. 382-385. The university town outside of Fort-de-France is named after him and he is still considered to be a local hero in Martinican history.

to see the truth in Théodorus' response. The repetition of 'quelle histoire' with a lower case 'h' implies that Théodorus is aware that History may well be in the making, but that it has little effect on his own 'histoire'. As he asks what the role of the 'nègres' in this large grand version of History can be, the reader cannot help but realise it is rhetorical. Confiant's fictional representation of the riots by the *nègres* some a hundred years on reinforces this situation. The violence seen in these fictional representations by each author is always connected to the white coloniser.

The *nègres* have no power and no say in the events that may change their condition. Therefore, even after the Abolition, the *nègres* find themselves in a situation where they are just as dependent on the *béké* as before, except this time he is not even obliged to feed or house them. Marie-Sophie recalls Esternome's description of their 'changed' situation:

Même si le commandeur n'avait plus de fouette, il était debout exactement pareil, le citoyen béké malgré sa citoyenneté passait aux mêmes heures et sur le même cheval, longvillait le travail avec les mêmes yeux. La sueur, Marie-Sophie, avait le même vieux goût, les serpents zinzolaient même pareil, et la chaleur n'avait pas changé même.

Cahier no. 4 de Marie-Sophie Laborieux. Page 12. 1965. Bibliothèque Schoelcher. (*T*, 129)

Here, Chamoiseau makes a direct comparison between the conditions of the slaves before the Abolition and after. Everything seems the same to Esternome, a point reinforced by the repetition of the word ‘même’, and also by the insertion of ‘vieux’, emphasising the sense of continuity for the former slaves. The description of post-Abolition life for the former slaves draws attention to the harsh physical realities of working on the plantations, particularly through the word ‘sueur’. The point Esternome makes to Marie-Sophie is that the major events of History have no impact on the lives of the former slaves. The continuity that the creolist authors establish linking the plantation system and the Antilles post-departmentalisation is the sense that History takes place without the *nègres*. This explains the aim of the creolist authors to interweave the multiple *histoires* of Antillean people in an attempt to give them back their own History, thus giving Antilleans the power to begin to challenge their oppression. The analysis above points to a violence that stems from the originary one which occurred on the slave ships amidst the horrors of the middle passage where the hierarchy of the master and slave was most vividly and brutally established.

Through their fictional representations, the creolist authors suggest that the germs of this violence have been carried on into the plantation system. As such, the situation for the Antillean, whose sense of self has been almost completely eroded in the transformation from African to Antillean slave and who is filled with rage, has changed little. The injustices of the colonial system and the power relations – as the fictional depiction of the riots imply – remain. The desire for violence and for retaliation remains but is shown to be futile. In the fictional

depictions of the riots, which take place in different times in history, the creolist authors both seem to emphasise how Antilleans are denied their own history and subjectivity. The textual representations examined in this chapter have identified the establishment of a pattern of violence in the work of the creolist authors that suggests the days of colonialism are far from over. Having demonstrated the existence of this violence, which can be clearly traced back to Antillean origins on the slave ships, the next chapter will examine in detail how the creolist authors represent the impact of such a pattern of violence on Antillean human interaction. Having established in this chapter that the Antillean's identity has been eroded, I will explore what hope exists of Antilleans forging fulfilling relationships with one another. Drawing on colonial theory, I will build on the notion, developed here, of a damaging pattern of violence that threatens to destroy completely the Antillean individual. This enables me to investigate how the authors represent its damaging impact on the individual – the Antillean writer in particular – and indeed human relationships in the Antilles at large. Moreover, I will explore how the brutality of Antillean origins and beyond is identified by Chamoiseau and Confiant into a psychological violence against the Antillean condition.

Chapter 2 – Sterility and the Repetition of Violence

The previous chapter demonstrates how the creolist authors indicate that the social and political roles of Antilleans have changed little since Abolition because those in power, namely the *békés* and the metropolitan authorities, have it in their interest to keep the existing structure intact. Edward Said describes this process in his introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, arguing that while colonialism as a geographical practice has died out, imperialism – i.e. the same ‘structure of attitude and reference’ remains as before (Said, p. xxi). Chamoiseau echoes this thought in his essay *Ecrire en pays dominé*, with specific reference to the Antilles. Chamoiseau begins his essay by examining the three different ‘types’ of domination that he considers to be exerted over Antilleans, and over the writer in particular: ‘La Brutale, la Silencieuse, la Furtive’ (EPD, p. 23). He refers to ‘la domination brutale’ (EPD, p. 17) of *un autre âge*, the slavery and plantation era where the violent treatment of the slaves was immediately identifiable. For Chamoiseau, this type of brutality is almost preferable to the ‘domination silencieuse’ (EPD, p. 21) which follows it because overt brutality can be confronted openly, ‘*Heureux ceux qui écrivent sous la domination de l’âge dernier: leurs poèmes peuvent faire les balles et conforter l’espoir du nombre de leurs impacts*’ (EPD, p. 18).⁶⁸ However, since that time, he indicates that the form of *domination* has become more sinister, arguing that the ‘chant dominateur [...] déforme l’esprit’ (p. 18) of the writer until s/he becomes a ‘geôlier attitré’ (p.

⁶⁸ This point is made explicitly by Biringaine Ndagano: ‘la plus dangeureuse de toutes est la domination mentale’ in Biringaine Ndagano, *Nègre tricolore: Littérature et domination en pays créole* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2000), p. 41.

18) whose imagination is ‘la source même d’un mimétisme stérile’ (p. 18) reproducing structures of his/her own domination. The image of the Antillean writer self-imprisoned in his own imagination because of the way in which his mind has been taken over is a powerful one. After all, there is little that is more damaging for a writer than to lose the freedom of his creative imagination. So, Chamoiseau implies that this second form of domination is more dangerous than the ‘brutal’ one of the colonising years because it deprives those who might resist the domination – the writers – of their weapons ‘toute domination (la silencieuse plus encore) [...] neutralise les expressions les plus intimes des peuples dominés’ (*EPD*, p. 21). In this sense, the domination also becomes ‘furtive’ because its effect can take place gradually and secretly. This latter domination can be seen as a form of neocolonisation that is linked to the increasing ‘mass consumerism’ (*EPD*, p. 229) and is most menacing because it represents ‘une domination dénuée de toute violence’ (*EPD*, p. 230):

Maintenant, sous domination furtive, le dilemme est terrible: on est soit connecté-passif et consommateur-en-voie-de-développement, soit déconnecté et livré aux antiquités des dominations brutales et silencieuses. (*EPD*, p. 236)

This quotation implies that, for Chamoiseau, this ‘furtive’ domination is the most dangerous, as it seems to induce the complete dependence of Antilleans, removing from them any clear enemy to resist or to fight.

Chamoiseau's outline of the different forms of oppression suffered by Antilleans indicates then that the repression is not necessarily violent, but that this does not undermine its power. It suggests that oppression continues long after the process of colonisation is over and above all, it positions the writer as one of the main figures of resistance in the face of the various types of domination. This chapter will examine closely how the creolist authors represent these 'silent', 'furtive' forms of violence in their work, beginning with an exploration of the most complex relationship of all – that between the coloniser and the colonised.

Part 1: The Colonial Relationship

Albert Memmi's analysis of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised provides a useful framework for this chapter, as Memmi focuses specifically on the way in which the colonial situation impacts on human relationships. As a Tunisian author, Memmi is not widely referred to in the Antilles. However – as will be explored below – his universal description of the colonial relationship seems to explain what is represented in the works of the creolist authors. I will be drawing primarily on his *Portrait du colonisé, Portrait du colonisateur*.

Memmi begins by examining the dilemma in which all *colonisateurs* find themselves: the desire to legitimise their position. In order to do so, they need to make the colonised 'méprisable' (p. 76). Memmi argues that the *colonisateur* must be aware of his privileged position and of his 'illégitimité double' (p. 34), firstly by being a foreigner, and secondly by imposing his own values and

traditions upon the indigenous people. Although the situation is slightly different in the Antilles given that the colonised are also outsiders in a sense, the same need for the coloniser to validate his position exists. Memmi believes that this feeling is shared by all the colonisers, regardless of their role in the social ladder, and that it makes them *négativement mieux* than the colonised and thus keeps the system in place. Such a system, based on *médiocratie* and the continued *autojustification* of the coloniser, is described by Memmi as a ‘variété de fascisme’ (p. 83), ‘un régime d’oppression au profit de quelques-uns’ (p. 83). As a result, ‘les relations humaines y sont issues d’une exploitation aussi poussée que possible, fondées sur l’inégalité et le mépris’ (p. 83). The words ‘inégalité’ and ‘mépris’ imply that human relationships are damaged. In this chapter, I will examine what indeed is the impact of this unlimited exploitation and in what ways the creolist authors suggest that ‘relations humaines’ are affected. However, before beginning any textual analysis, it is important to outline how Memmi considers the colonised response to the colonial situation.

Memmi begins with the *portrait mythique du colonisé* where he traces how the coloniser constructs an image of the colonised:

A la base de toute la construction [...] on trouve une dynamique unique: celle des exigences économiques et affectives du colonisateur, qui lui tient lieu du logique, commande et explique chacun des traits qu’il prête au colonisé. (Memmi, p. 103)

Memmi argues that traits such as the ‘incroyable paresse’ (p. 99) attributed to the colonised are used universally by colonisers, again in order to justify their own position. All of this leads to the ‘dehumanisation’ of the colonised, a process that is represented in the work of Chamoiseau and Confiant as examined in the previous chapter. Memmi argues that within the colonial situation, this universally constructed portrait of the colonised ‘finit, dans une certaine mesure, par être accepté et vécu par le colonisé. Il gagne une certaine réalité et contribue au portrait réel du colonisé’ (p. 107). In this way, the colonised is dependent on the coloniser for his sense of self, just as the coloniser is dependent on the colonised for his own existence. Memmi continues by arguing that the response of the colonised to this projection of identity by the coloniser is one of imitation: ‘lui ressembler jusqu’à disparaître en lui’ (p. 137). It is this point in particular that is important for our analysis, recalling as it does Chamoiseau’s description of himself as a *geôlier* in *Ecrire*. In other words, the Antillean becomes his own jailor by imprisoning himself in a mimetically European mentality. Memmi’s argument that the colonised imitate the only ‘model’ available to them: the ‘mécanisme de néantisation’ (p. 143) established by the coloniser. Memmi’s use of the term ‘mécanisme’ brings us back to the notion of a destructive ‘machine’. In this chapter, I will explore further the metaphor of a ‘machine’ or ‘mechanism’ in which the colonised and the coloniser are trapped. As the previous chapter demonstrates this machine stems directly from the colonial system that is still firmly in place in the Antilles. I will examine how this mechanism affects human

relationships, and creates a cycle of human violence that – the creolist authors indicate in their work – continues to structure Antillean society.

The Impact of Domination – An Oppressive Mechanism

Using Memmi's analysis of the damaged colonised-coloniser relationship, the opening section of this chapter will trace the different ways in which the creolist authors portray the psychologically crushing force of the relationship between the *béké* and his fellow Black Antillean, and how it has impacted on the generations of Antilleans after Abolition. I will begin by returning to the riot extracts examined in the previous chapter from *Texaco* and *L'Allée*. Having examined the depiction of the physical violence, I will now concentrate on other, more subtle effects. Both authors imply that the reasons behind the riots are clear. In *Texaco*, the crowd are described as 'injuriant les békés, maudissant les blancs-france' (p.113) and, as seen in the above analysis of *L'Allée*, the 'blancs' are also being insulted by the demonstrators. However, in *L'Allée*, there is a clear distinction being made between the white European and the *béké*.⁶⁹ In *Texaco*, the *béké* and the metropolitan authorities are on the same side at the time of Abolition but by the time of the riots in 1959, Confiant suggests that this collusion has dwindled. Instead, the *béké* is no longer seen as an outsider or a coloniser but is instead a Creole figure to be revered by the (misguided) *assimilée(e)s*, an impression that is heightened in the following extract of Ancinelle's reaction to the statue of

⁶⁹ In her thesis, the *békée* Edith Kovats-Beaudoux explores the attitudes of the *Blancs créoles* (she calls them the 'Créoles') and informs us that the *béké* feels very distant to the *métropoles*, 'Face à ces étrangers, le Créole se sent plus proche des Martiniquais de couleur qui sont enracinés dans la même terre, qui ont partagé la même histoire', 'Une minorité dominante: les blancs créoles de la Martinique' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Paris, 1970), p. 180.

Joséphine. The connection between slavery and the 1950s riots is made when the first object Ancinelle sees as she returns to consciousness is the sight of the statue of Joséphine, wife of Napoleon.⁷⁰ Yet Ancinelle only sees the *blancheur immaculée* of the stone, as the statue smiles at her. Ancinelle tries desperately to smile back,

Mais ses lèvres demeuraient cousues ou plutôt comme si elles avaient été maintenues par des pinces à linges. Alors elle eut honte d'elle et se dit
 “Joséphine doit me considérer comme une sacrée mal élevée”. (AS, p. 27)

Despite her pain and the blood running down her face, Ancinelle is still anxious to please this *békée* statue. Her naivety is emphasised, as is her good nature; she does not want to appear rude or badly brought up. However, Confiant's text suggests that this is more than politeness. It conveys the extent to which the strict racial order established by the colonial elite has been assimilated by the Antillean population, even 100 years after Abolition. There is almost something humorous in the desire to please a statue, but here this desire only highlights Ancinelle's innocence: even as she is lying on the street, having been seriously injured by the *blancs*, she cannot make the connection between the *blancs*, represented here by Joséphine, and the injustice of their actions. The quotation also draws attention, once again, to Ancinelle's passivity – symbolically, she feels as though her lips have been sewn tightly together and held in place with pins. In front of

⁷⁰ It is rumoured that in 1794, Bonaparte could not decide whether to reinstate slavery after its abolition in 1789 and that it was his wife, the *békée* Joséphine who persuaded him to bring it back. Armand Nicholas (Vol. 1, p. 285) backs up this theory tentatively but adds that 'les intérêts de la nouvelle classe dominante bourgeoise pesèrent beaucoup plus lourd dans la décision de Bonaparte' (p. 285).

Joséphine's symbolic power, she is even more silenced and subjugated than under the physical foot of the European. Here, Ancinelle's feelings of *honte* in front of a statue seem similar to Memmi's description of the way in which the colonised is condemned by his very adulation of the coloniser, and is akin to Chamoiseau's *domination furtive*. Memmi describes how 'l'amour du colonisateur est sous-tendu d'un complexe de sentiments qui vont de la honte à la haine de soi' (Memmi, p. 137). Here, Ancinelle's admiration for Joséphine is made clear, as is her desire to please the statue, a feeling that is only matched by her own sense of shame. In this depiction of Ancinelle at the feet of the statue of the woman who symbolises the continued enslavement of the colonised, the 'mythical portrait' of the colonised outlined by Memmi is clearly in evidence. Confiant's portrayal corresponds to the 'model' of the colonial relationship, held in place by the 'contempt' of the coloniser – represented here in Joséphine's statue – and the 'shame' of the colonised.

The complexity of the colonised-coloniser relationship is also in evidence in Chamoiseau's *Texaco* where the collusion between the *béké* and the metropolitan French authorities is represented. In the time immediately after Abolition, the former slaves demand their share of the land from the *béké*, arguing that it belongs to the 'Bon Dieu' (T, p. 126) and in order to convince the former slaves, the *béké* disappears into town and returns with an official paper from the mayor stating that '*la terre appartient au Bon Dieu, oui, mais les champs appartiennent aux békés et aux propriétaires.*' (T, p. 127). However, the irony is that, with the exception of Esternome, none of the *nègres* understand

written French and so there is no immediate reaction. Esternome tells the others what the words mean, ‘cherchant ses mots du fait d’un contrecœur, car lui voulait vivre Ninon et pas ces histoires-là’ (*T*, p. 127). Esternome’s refusal to acknowledge the manipulation of the collaborating French authorities and the *békés*, dismissed as ‘ces histoires-là’ again shows how little he cares about the larger picture. Here, Chamoiseau’s representation of Esternome’s disinterest in History suggests how little it matters to him precisely because he has no say in it, a phenomenon also described by Memmi. He argues that one of most damaging *carences* inflicted on the colonised ‘*est d’être placé hors de l’histoire et hors de la cité*’ (Memmi, p. 111) because the colonised then become so used to having no say or participation in the bigger events of his life that he forgets what that freedom means: the colonised are unable to play a part in the history or in the governing of his country. Memmi goes further though, ‘En aucune manière il n’est sujet de l’histoire; bien entendu il en subit le poids, souvent plus cruellement que les autres, mais toujours comme objet’ (Memmi, pp. 111-112). In this quotation, the strength of words such as ‘aucune’ and ‘toujours’ emphasise the crushing permanence of this situation and the complete enforced passivity of the slave. This process, Memmi argues, eventually means that the colonised has become so used to playing no part in history that ‘il ne la réclame même plus’ (p. 112). Chamoiseau’s depiction of Esternome implies a certain agreement with Memmi’s model of the colonised as necessarily removed from their history by the colonial system that continues to structure Antillean society.

The manipulation of the colonised outlined by Memmi and represented by Chamoiseau draws attention to the determination of the *békés* to hold on to their complete power over them. In *Texaco*, it is a lack of knowledge of the French language that leads to submission; the workers are too proud to admit their ignorance. In this case it is not physical domination that represses the workers but a cultural inferiority complex. Although there is no violent repression of the workers here, there is a form of violence that is described by Fanon, who also draws attention to the danger of such subtle form of domination. In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Fanon states that

Tout peuple colonisé – c'est-à-dire tout peuple duquel a pris naissance un complexe d'infériorité, du fait de la mise au tombeau de l'originalité culturelle locale – se situe vis-à-vis du langage de la nation civilisatrice, c'est-à-dire de la culture métropolitaine. (p. 14)

Here, Fanon refers to the hint of violence done to the colonised's cultural inferiorisation, which has been destroyed by the imposition of the more powerful, European one. This quotation also highlights the dehumanising aspect of colonisation, for the sense of inferiority comes from the assassination of the people's cultural originality. This sense of violence seems linked to Chamoiseau's *domination silencieuse*. The workers in *Texaco* are embarrassed about their inability to understand French and their ability to express themselves has therefore been destroyed. Here the workers appear caught in the 'mythical

portrait' of themselves, whereby they see themselves through the eyes of the coloniser and so feel that sense of shame.

While Confiant does not examine the different forms of domination specifically, he does indicate that after the period of slavery is over, there is a continuation of colonialisation. This is outlined in *Commandeur du sucre*, in the words of the *conteur* Gesner, 'l'esclavage a été remplacé par l'esclavitude' (CS, p. 31),⁷¹ emphasising, like Chamoiseau, how similar the conditions of life are for the *nègre* as a slave or as a worker for the *béké*. Confiant continually suggests in his work that this situation is the *déveine* of the *nègre*, as shall be examined below. In other words, Confiant's representation of the colonial situation seems to be similar to Said's argument that the mode of imperialism remains in place, even if territorial gain is no longer the focus. Confiant also seems to depict a similar mechanism to the one outlined by Memmi whereby both the colonised and the coloniser are locked in a mutually defining relationship as long the colonial situation continues. Above all, however, Confiant's fictional representation of *le nègre* corresponds to Fanon's analysis of the black man's perception of himself in *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Fanon's psychoanalytic exploration of the black man leads him to conclude that the latter's sense of self is completely annihilated because of his identification with the white man. While Confiant mocks this attitude in his texts, caricaturing to what extremes his *nègres* characters believe

⁷¹ It is significant that it is in the words of the *conteur* that Confiant voices this sentiment for – as shall be seen in the final chapter – the *conteur* is seen by the Creolist authors as the first voice of resistance on the plantations and is a respected figure of wisdom (LC, pp. 72-83).

this, he also uses to it to suggest to Antilleans how much their perception of themselves is blighted by the ‘vieux crachat esclavagiste’ (*LC*, p.50).

The textual analysis above implies that the creolist authors see a violent model for human interaction emerging from the plantation which corresponds to Memmi’s summation of the specific roles for the coloniser and the colonised within the colonial system which ‘fabrique des colonialistes, comme elle fabrique des colonisés’ (p. 77), once again evoking the notion of an industrial machine in which each individual is trapped. The motif of imprisonment that is present throughout Memmi’s text implies that there is no obvious way out unless the entire system collapses. This form of destruction is a similar form of violence to the one represented in the previous chapter in terms of the psychology and the destruction of the sense of self of the colonised, and corresponds to what Memmi terms, as we have seen, ‘un mécanisme du néantisation’ (p. 143). What is so terrible about Memmi’s destructive ‘mechanism’ is its immortality: that it will continue as long as the colonial situation which, as the creolist authors’ works indicate, is still present in 1950s Martinique.

A Human Model

Memmi’s assessment of the colonial situation is particularly relevant to our analysis because of his focus on the psychological aspects of the colonial system, and his treatment of it as a structure that moulds people into specific, prescribed roles. This mechanism of power seems to describe the system of control in Antillean society as depicted by Confiant. This section will explore how this

‘pattern’ is represented in two of Confiant’s novels: *Nuée ardente* and *Commandeur*. Here, a key difference seems to be emerging between the two creolist authors. Although both consider the model for human interaction established during the colonial era as damaging, Confiant seems to dwell on the damage of the model on individuals and their relationships, whereas Chamoiseau, as we see later, seems more concerned with how this model is repeated (in the form of a *Malédiction*).

The establishment of this ‘pattern’ as one that stems directly from colonisation is most cruelly visible in Confiant’s *Nuée ardente*. This eruption in 1902 destroyed the town of Saint-Pierre killing more than 30,000 people, embedding the tragedy firmly in Martinican memory. The novel is set in the few months before the eruption and interweaves the increasingly obvious signs of volcanic movement (such as the ash floating down like snow, the black cloud eclipsing the sun, rivers of lava) with the lives of different strata of Saint Pierre society. For the purposes of the present analysis, I will focus on the character Lafrique Guinée, whose treatment by the rest of the community conforms to the violent pattern of abuse outlined above. Lafrique is the most marginalised character in the novel. An old African slave, he is the one voice to warn the *nègres* of the terrible fate that awaits them because of the way in which they have betrayed their roots. His inability to forget his ancestors makes the other *nègres* suspicious of him. As he berates them loudly and publicly for their treachery in

their determined forgetfulness of the past, he is deemed officially insane and sent to the local *Maison de Santé*.⁷²

The violence he undergoes there seems to have a more devastating effect on him than any of the horrors he underwent during his time as a slave. He states that he has no fear of death from the volcano after ‘cette fièvre-frisson terrible’ (p. 236) that, along with the ‘rires égarés’ (p. 237) of his tormented ancestors, has inhabited him for as long as he can remember. The indignity he suffers in the hospital is directly equated to the violence of the middle passage and his time as a slave. This violence is significant for we know that he suffered the brutality of life on the plantations and yet in the hospital far greater indignities are inflicted upon him; for it is here that his mind is emptied. Before discussing the implications of this, the following quotation outlines Lafrique’s experience, which demonstrates how the doctors and nurses attempt to bring him to ‘reason’:

Ils vous amarrent sur une chaise de fer et vous baillent des décharges électriques par le travers du corps. Vous sentez votre tête prête à éclater comme une goyave trop mûre, tous vos muscles se contractent dans une tremblade sans-manman et vous avez beau vous contorsionner et hurler, ils ne bougent pas d’une maille, inflexibles dans leurs blousons blanches, notant vos réactions sur leurs cahiers et brocantant des paroles à voix basse. Quand je

⁷² The theme of madness is a recurrent one for the Creolist authors and affects many of their characters (eg. Hermancia in *Le Meurtre du Samedi-Gloria*; Cicéron in *L’Allée* ; Pipi in *Chronique* to name but three). The regularity with which it appears suggests that it can be seen as a symbol of the consequences of centuries of repression from an ‘alien’ culture.

sortais d'une pareille séance, l'écale de ma tête était vidée à-quoi-dire un coco-sec, je titubais jusqu'à mon lit où des infirmiers me ligotaient. (*NuA*, p. 237)

The coldness and indifference of the staff is emphasised in the rigidity of their stiff uniform, but especially by their silence, which contrasts with the physical distortion and screams of Lafrique. While his entire body is pulled and stretched to its physical limits, the staff do not seek to comfort or help him and their aloofness indicates how little his suffering affects them. The violence appears completely routine and mechanical. Here, the hospital staff represents assimilated Antillean society in general. The brutality of the sessions physically and mentally destroys Lafrique. Before, all he could hear in his head were the 'bruit de chaînes, claquements de fouet sur les dos nus, cris et sang' (p. 236) from his time as a slave. However, the treatment at the hospital is destructive enough to replace the clanking with an emptiness, symbolised by the Creole word *coco-sec*.

Through Lafrique's treatment, Confiant suggests the extent to which violence and repression is embedded in Antillean identity. Although the slave trade may be over, the patterns of behaviour witnessed by the enslaved *nègre* are in turn repeated by the next generations of *nègres*, who want to dominate and control so they are no longer in the weakest position. The hierarchy represented here is described and explained by Memmi:

Telle l'histoire de la pyramide des tyranneaux: chacun, socialement opprimé par un plus puissant que lui, trouve toujours un moins puissant pour se reposer sur lui et se faire tyran à son tour. (Memmi, p. 41)

It is only after the description of the violence inflicted upon Lafrique that we learn that his 'tortionnaire' (p. 239) is a *nègre*, and not the metropolitan French nurses that we may have assumed. In other words, the model of imitation identified by Memmi is being enacted and its violence is continuing. The 'pyramide des tyranneaux' identified by Memmi whereby each individual exerts his power on those weaker than him is a useful way to consider this episode. For there is no portrayal of solidarity between the Blacks here and instead the violence has been reproduced by black Martinicans. It is not just being inflicted by the colonisers but also by the slaves' descendents. *Confiant* seems to be implying that each individual is so damaged by the system that s/he simply perpetrates the violence on those weaker, or more vulnerable than themselves. This behaviour implies that the colonial mechanism is still in place and that it reproduces itself at each level of the power structure of society. It is a violence that does not necessarily occur within the boundaries of the plantation but seems to permeate every aspect of Antillean life – a pattern that cannot be broken.

In *Confiant's Le Commandeur du sucre*, we see a similar representation of violence. Set on the plantation, this novel takes place in 1969, some ninety years after Abolition, at a time when the sugar cane industry is in decline and increasing numbers of the workers are rejecting the plantations to move into the town of Fort-de-France, referred to by the characters as *L'En-ville*. Despite these massive social changes, this novel portrays a society in which the injustices of the colonial system are firmly embedded and kept in place by an ambiguous, intense relationship between the masters and former slaves. The continual movement in

the novel between the third-person and first-person narrator (the *mulâtre commandeur* Firmin Léandor) offers two different perspectives of life on the plantation. From these two perspectives, the reader is thus privy to both the internal thoughts of the *commandeur* and also the broader context of the plantation. Firmin's race is significant in the text; as a *mulâtre* he has a higher status and privileges than the *nègres* whom he controls on the plantation yet he himself is under the power of the *béké*. Firmin tells us at the beginning of the novel how whenever one of the *békés* looks at him, his very sense of identity seems to wilt: 'C'est curieux: il n'y a que devant eux que je me sens nègre' (CS, p. 11). This statement implies that the gaze of the white Creole empties Firmin of all his sense of self, and indeed that the effect would have been the same regardless of which *béké* were to look at him. It is not a contempt that is personal but one that is a collective one. Firmin suggests that this effect may come from the *béké*'s look 'qui vous aplatit au même niveau, qui mulâtres, qui nègres, qui mulets, qui cabrouets, qui champs de canne. Pour eux, tout ça, c'est la même engeance' (CS, p. 11). The *béké* cannot even distinguish between humans and inanimate objects here; they are all simply part of the colonial 'mechanism'.⁷³ The completely dehumanising aspect of the *béké*'s gaze recalls Fanon's sudden awareness of his body and colour, enforced upon him by a white person's reaction to him:

⁷³ This recalls the words of the *béké* in Chamoiseau's *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse*, quoted in Chapter 1, 'Parfois même, le regard attentif du Maître ne le distingue pas du bloc des machines; elles semblent aller seules' (EVHM, p. 23).

Ce jour-là, désorienté, incapable d'être dehors avec l'autre, le Blanc, qui, impitoyable, m'emprisonnait, je me portai loin de mon être-là, très loin, me constituant objet. (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 91)

As in the case of Firmin in *Commandeur*, the white person's gaze has a violent effect here, an impression that is portrayed in the 'imprisoning' action of the look, as if it displaces Fanon and even kills his sense of self. Confiant's depiction of the white man's gaze therefore establishes a Fanonian construction of the oppressed man.

Firmin is essentially employed by the *béké* to ensure the *nègres* are kept in check working in the sugar cane fields. The sense of domination this role assigns to Firmin is partly what keeps the system, or *pyramide* in place. The rigidity of the structure is maintained by the tight bond within each racial division whereby 'la couleur protège la couleur' (CS, p. 227). This structure reinforces the argument put forward in the last chapter that the plantation system is a machine in which each part is tightly held in place. Although slavery is abolished and the workers can no longer be considered as the fodder for that particular manifestation of the machine, Confiant implies that the workers' attitude to one another is controlled by this rigid machine. As a result, despite their mutual hatred, there is a level of collusion between the *commandeurs* and the plantation owners because they are all working towards the same goal: to maintain their own economic position by ensuring the sugar cane intake and controlling those at the bottom end of the scale – again conforming to Memmi's tyrannical pyramid.

Firmin believes his power is kept intact because the workers respect him: 'Un commandeur d'habitation n'est pas fait pour être aimé mais pour se faire obéir et faire les *nègres* marcher droit' (CS, p. 67). This sense of power clearly appeals to him, making him feel important. However the reader understands that his position is upheld mainly because he carries a gun and so he rules through fear, just as the *béké* controls Firmin through fear. In other words, like the slave ship and the entire slavery era, those in power retain control through the threat of violence. The plantation system has instilled in the Antilles a 'melanocracy', ⁷⁴ or a rigid hierarchy that is governed by race. Firmin, as a *mulâtre*, seems to consider himself as superior to the *nègres* who are repeatedly described through *style indirect libre* throughout the novel as 'le pire des races'. This phrase, and other similar ones, become almost like a chorus and any initial sensitivity on behalf of the reader about such overt racism is soon lost through its repeated use. The reader thus experiences a process of 'banalisation' that is shocking in itself. *Confiant* depicts a society that is strictly defined by colour where each racial stratum despises the other. Firmin's attitude is explained by his own upbringing:

Mon père m'avait souvent mis en garde: 'Méfie-toi du nègre! Il n'y a pas plus traître que cette nation-là' [...] Ma mère ajoutait: 'C'est la dernière des races après les crapaud-ladres et les coulis. (pp. 15-16)

⁷⁴ In 'Fables of Melanocracy: 'Race' Reversals in French Literature' (*Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 37.1 [2001], 1-14), Roger Little comments on the absence of critical interest in texts that deal with racial reversal, implying that any movement within this structure unnerves Whites. This inflexibility does indeed seem to be portrayed in the strict roles in which *Confiant* places his characters, suggesting that the system is indeed irreversible.

Indeed, Confiant's representation throughout his work of the harsh treatment of the *coulis* in Antillean society suggests that they are always marginalised by the Creoles who regard them with suspicion.⁷⁵ In *Commandeur*, through Firmin's voice, Confiant nuances the narrative and suggests that the racial situation is more ambiguous. Although Firmin rules by the threat of violence, he also displays moments of tenderness for his workers. One day out in the fields his attention is attracted by 'un magnifique négrillon' (p. 179). Clutching the baby to his chest, he feels the soft down of 'le cheveu nègre' and wonders why Afro hair is considered to be so ugly. A sudden realisation strikes him:

Le Blanc avait infecté l'œil du nègre de haïssance envers sa propre race. Son oeil le [le cheveu] voyait laid. Plus on s'éloignait du nègre, plus on devenait mulâtre, moins on était laid. De confuses pensées l'avaient toujours agité à ce sujet: tantôt il vomissait les Blancs, tantôt il abhorrait les nègres. (CS, p. 179)

This quotation recalls, once again, the mythical portrait of the colonised, who can only see themselves in the image constructed for them by the coloniser. As Ancinelle's reaction to the statue in *L'Allée* implied, the adulation of the *Blanc* (the coloniser) by the *nègre* (the colonised) leads to feelings of 'shame' or even 'self-loathing'. Undoubtedly because Firmin is a *mulâtre*, he is neither coloniser

⁷⁵ It is important to note that very little research has been carried out on the integration of the Indians (and Chinese and Syrians) who arrived after the Abolition although they were very quickly assimilated into Antillean society and some argue this is the reason that they have not maintained a separate identity. For example, the 'national' dish of Martinique 'le colombo' comes from Sri Lanka. These later immigrants rarely feature in Chamoiseau's fictional writing although Confiant's most recent novel examines the arrival and integration of an Indian family in Martinique, *La Panse du chacal* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2004).

nor colonised but instead is somewhere in the middle of the ‘pyramide des tyranneaux’.

This quotation provides a key insight into the crisis of identity that Confiant suggests inhabits all Antilleans. In the melanocracy, Firmin feels ambiguity because his mind is torn between his sense of injustice which tells him that racist attitudes are wrong, and his loyalty to the system that tells him who he is. The quotation indicates that Firmin is literally ‘between’ the *béké* and the *mulâtre*. The ambivalence felt by Firmin is created by his position in the tightly rigid colonial structure. Firmin acknowledges that his power comes from his *mulâtre* status, admitting to the reader his feelings of guilt as he watches the workers trail past him:

Je regardais avec pitié le sombre défilé des coupeurs de canne et des amarreuses [...] Parfois je me surprénais à maugréer: – Qu’est-ce que le nègre a bien pu faire au Bondieu? Ah mulâtre, tu ne connais pas ta chance, tu ne la connais pas! (CS, p. 300)

His feelings of pity for the *nègres* make him question what he does and he is clearly aware that he is in a position of privilege. Nonetheless, he also seems to despise them because of their inability to get themselves out of their misery, while at the same time this is what he admires in them: ‘Le nègre est une race que rien ne pourra jamais dérailler’ (p. 80). The confusion felt by Firmin throughout this novel is indicated in his occasional cruel treatment of the *nègres* despite his fierce love for them. The tension felt by him, pulled between his contempt for the

béké and his intense frustration with the *nègre*, recalls Memmi's assessment about the way in which the colonial system affects colonised peoples and especially their relationships with each other. Yet the rest of the narrative implies that such individual insight and perception of the injustice of the system is rare. Instead, the *style indirect libre* of the collective voice depicts a community that is indeed ruled by colour prejudice.

Firmin's occasional comments on the cruelty and the abuse of power that goes on around him provide insights to the *békés'* ability to maintain their power. Through solidarity and by controlling the land, even after Abolition, they enforce the *nègres'* dependence on them, as the earlier example from *Texaco* implies (See p. 100). This form of repression is maintained through fear, with the collaboration of the *mulâtres* such as the *commandeurs* who in turn do not want to be return to the terrible conditions from which they have managed to escape. However, violence is also present in the interaction between the *nègres*. Later in *Commandeur*, the proverb, 'le nègre hait le nègre' (p. 269) is voiced by the narrator who wonders in a seemingly innocently tone, whether it has anything to do with slavery in view of the fact that "le nègre déteste le nègre depuis l'époque des chaînes aux pieds." Mais l'esclavage était si tellement loin dans nos têtes, si oublié, gommé même, qu'il n'y avait plus désormais aucun motif de se haïr l'un l'autre' (CS, p. 269). The feigned innocence of such a comment suggests the extent to which, in Confiant's work, common Antillean people are portrayed as wanting to forget the past, and in particular the painful memories of slavery – as the community's treatment of Lafrique in *Nuée ardente* also indicates. Firmin's

comments have a strong didactic tone, giving a reason for Antilleans to stop fighting one another and forcing the reader to wonder why indeed such hatred continues between the *nègres*. Again, the artlessness of the tone creates an impression of collective naivety, reinforced by the loaded ‘nul n’aurait encore pu apporter d’explication plausible’ (p. 269). And so it is left to the reader to decide why the *nègres* ‘s’entre-détrui[sent]’ (p. 269). This deliberate provocation, combined with Firmin’s growing realisation of the injustice of the colonial machine conveys to the reader Confiant’s explanation for the ongoing repression of Antilleans by Antilleans. He implies that the former slaves are trapped within, and reproduce for themselves, this violent system, but that they are not aware of the mechanisms that control them. Or, that they do not want to question these mechanisms too closely in case their own situations worsen – thus fear is disempowering them all, as Firmin’s behaviour indicates. He does not want to help the *nègres* in case he becomes like them. The narrator goes on to point out that the *blancs*, on the other hand, behave in the opposite way and are *solidaires* with one another.

Confiant’s representations of the coloniser/colonised pair seem to imply that he holds a similar view of the colonial situation to Memmi. In the textual examples analysed above, it seems that both the coloniser and colonised derive their roles from their historical and social relationship to one another, each defined by his role in the colonial system. This corresponds to Memmi’s model whereby an existentially programming set of conditions binds the coloniser to the colonised and vice versa. However, as the above analysis of Confiant’s depiction

of the colonial relationships in *Commandeur* suggests, the self-perception of the colonised can also be read as an illustration of Fanon's *nègre* as a dislocated object. The first part of this chapter implies that both of the creolist authors represent the colonial relationship in metaphors that are primarily concerned with constructed images and mythical portraits, all of which depict the colonised as trapped in a perception of the self that seems only able to exist in the eyes of the other, the coloniser. These metaphors reinforce the impression of the continuing dehumanising effect of colonialism after the end of slavery; and they show the colonised-coloniser relationship as an overwhelmingly violent one that defines them both, imprisoning each in a specific role. The depiction of this form of brutality borne by the colonised corresponds to the opening pages of *Eloge*, where the creolist authors lament the Creole situation:

Nous sommes fondamentalement frappés d'extériorité [...] Condition terrible que celle de percevoir son architecture intérieure, son monde, les instants de ses jours, ses valeurs propres, avec le regard de l'Autre. (*EC*, p. 14)

This inability to perceive the self in any way other than through the eyes of the other is a form of violence that is powerfully self-destructive: for the self is almost completely annihilated. In their fictional representations of this *condition terrible*, it is therefore unsurprising that Chamoiseau and Confiant choose to portray human relationships as damaged or dysfunctional. However, one is also forced to ask how these depictions can enable the authors, or their readers, to

overcome the horrors of the past. In the remainder of the chapter, I will look at other human relationships that are represented in the works of the creolist authors – most specifically, sexual relationships – to examine whether they too are equally affected by the colonial system. Until this point, the violence examined in this thesis has been primarily colonial and masculine. The next – and final – part of this chapter will explore how this violence positions the female characters in the works of the creolist authors.

Part 2: Sexual Violence

The representation of sexual violence in the works of the creolist authors is important because of its prevalence in their work. Ania Loomba, in a chapter assessing the link between ‘Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Discourse’ (pp. 151-172), examines the representation of the female body in literature and image over the ages across all four continents. She concludes that – despite local variations – by and large, ‘[f]rom the beginning of the colonial period till its end (and beyond), female bodies symbolise the conquered land’ (Loomba, p. 152). Drawing on Gayatri Spivak’s analysis, Loomba examines gender dynamics in the colonial situation, notably the tension between the colonial and the native males, quoting Spivak to show how the colonial male establishes himself as some sort of saviour of the ‘brown woman’ from the ‘brown man’.⁷⁶ Despite this, as Loomba herself notes, the colonised female is not always constructed as the passive victim for, ‘[t]he non-European woman also appears in an intractable version, as

⁷⁶ Here, Loomba quotes Spivak’s chapter, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp. 271-313, p. 296.

‘Amazonian’ or ‘deviant femininity’ (Loomba, p. 154), a comment that is backed up by a close examination of the representation of deviant sexuality in literature throughout the colonial period.⁷⁷ Loomba’s assessment of an increasing male fear towards colonial female sexuality on the part of both the colonised and the coloniser leads her to conclude that:

Women on both sides of the colonial divide demarcate both the innermost sanctums of race, culture and nation, as well as the porous frontiers through which these are penetrated. (Loomba, p. 159)

Across the female body then, the tensions between the male coloniser and colonised are played out, and can be either intensified or eroded. From such a ‘double positioning’ (p. 159), however, it is clear that the colonised female is marginalised.

Loomba’s assessment of the representation of colonial women also examines how the process of colonisation often demolished the matriarchal aspect of many societies, leaving the female in a position of subordination to the men (Loomba, p. 167). Loomba quotes Mies, Nandy and Aunima in their analysis of changing gender roles in Hindu society, and makes the link between sexuality and property. From this, she states that the colonial situation ‘intensified patriarchal relationships’ (p. 168) because of its impact on colonised men and their exclusion from the governing power. Our use of Memmi in the earlier part of this chapter has indeed emphasised the damage that such exclusion inflicts on the colonial

⁷⁷ Loomba refers specifically to Gwen Bergner, Helen Carr, Sigmund Freud and Anne McClintock.

male. Moreover, as Loomba comments, the disempowerment of the colonised men impacted on colonised women, concluding that male frustration led the men to 'seiz[e] upon the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality' (Loomba, p. 168). In other words, in order to regain some sense of power, the men became more violent, or 'tyrannical' (p. 168) in their domestic situations. This is why female maltreatment becomes possible and even necessary, as the men persecute in an objectified other what they dislike or dis-identify with (because of colonialism) in themselves. This description seems to correlate with Memmi's 'pyramide des tyranneaux', with colonised women at the very bottom level of the oppression.

Anne McClintock traces the language used to describe colonisation and demonstrates that since the beginning of the imperial process, capturing the land and a people are often described in sexual, feminising language. To illustrate this point, she quotes Christopher Columbus 'blundering about the Caribbean' writing home and 'femini[zing] the earth as a cosmic breast in which the epic male hero is a tiny, lost infant, yearning for the Edenic nipple' (McClintock, p. 21). Women are not only constructed as 'emblems' for colonised men but, according to McClintock are also used as a means for colonised men to mark their territory:

Linked symbolically to the land, women [...] are figured as property belonging to men and hence as lying, by definition, outside the male contests over land, money and political power. (McClintock, p. 31)

What is significant here is that it is specifically women who are excluded from the making of History, and who are denied all subjectivity. Instead, they seem to become synonymous with the land. This is a point to which we will return in the following two chapters. Here what matters is that women are treated as ‘property’ by the colonised men who have neither land nor territory to claim as their own. The treatment of women as male property is even more embedded in Martinican society as a result of the *Code Noir*, a law introduced by the French colonisers in 1685 which, as Maeve McCusker notes, effectively turned the slave into the ‘the property of the master, a fact attested to in the *Code noir* which explicitly designated the slave ‘le meuble du maître’.⁷⁸

In the works of Chamoiseau and Confiant the association between the female and property is highlighted. In Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*, Marie-Sophie, having found herself orphaned, finds work as a *bonne* in different households in Fort-de-France where she meets the charming Basile. Although she is still a young girl, he seduces her and she is eventually forced to flee the household. When she arrives at Basile’s place in need of assistance, he agrees to take her in but his attitude changes, ‘Basile m’ordonna de ne pas bouger, de ne pas sortir, de me cacher dans la chambre à la moindre visite, et de ne plus remuer. Mon calvaire commençait...’ (p. 255). Marie-Sophie is forced to become a virtual prisoner in his home, and when his other women – his ‘cousines’ (p. 259) – drop by with little gifts for Basile, Marie-Sophie must hide at the end of the bed and

⁷⁸ Maeve McCusker, ‘No Place like Home? Constructed as Identity in Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*’, in *Ici-Là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French*, ed. Mary Gallagher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 41-60, (p. 42).

essentially make herself invisible. This treatment of Marie-Sophie by the man who is in effect her first lover portrays a sexual relationship that is not based on love or trust but one that instead imprisons Marie-Sophie in a home where she is completely dependent on Basile. This situation seems to match McClintock's description of women as male property. Here, Marie-Sophie as another possession of Basile in sexual terms but also in economic terms: she is bound to the property. The images of imprisonment that have been identified throughout the works of the creolist authors seem especially noticeable here. The colonised man may be physically free here but the woman is temporarily enslaved. The man here replicates the colonial structure as outlined by Memmi as well as the gender roles discussed by McClintock.

Confiant, in *Le Nègre et L'Amiral*, depicts a similar image of the role of women as men's property. The *béké* Joseph de Maisonneuve welcomes the captured German prisoner of war, Helmut von Teuerschmitt into his home and offers him the 'services' of Noëllise, his black servant:

Il caressa les seins de la négresse, qui se laissa faire en protestant avec faiblesse.

«Si vous la voulez ce soir dans votre lit, pas de problème! fit-il à l'Allemand.

- Nein!

- Vous avez tort, mon cher. Les femmes de races inférieures et des peuples vaincus sont faites pour être baisées. C'est ce qui s'est toujours passé dans l'Histoire.

- Nous avons vaincu la France et pourtant nous ne violons pas les Françaises tous les jours», rétorqua Helmut agacé. (*NA*, p. 233)

For a novel set during the Second World War, the presence of a German here is significant. Helmut is a Nazi who embraces the ideology that certain races are inferior to his own. Yet here, even the extreme racism of Nazi ideology seems less crude than the colonial heritage fiercely protected by the *békés*. In this quotation, the woman is a passive, nameless object, 'la', who is used as an object of exchange between the two men. Indeed later, with as little feeling, the *béké* will consider 'offering' his own daughter Gervaise to Helmut in the hope that he will impregnate her and thus guarantee the 'purity' of the *béké* race. The idea comes from the most important *béké*, Salin du Bercy who 'proposa à de Maisonneuve d'ammener l'Allemand à engrosser Gervaise' (*NA*, p. 238). This makes Gervaise sound like some sort of object to be impregnated, almost as if she were an animal. Salin justifies the proposition by evoking the greater good of the *béké* community, 'Il nous faut effacer les quelques gouttes de sang noir qui courent dans nos veines, mon vieux' (p. 238). Admitting that Hitler may be 'fou ou mégalomane', Salin argues that he is right about something: 'la race blanche doit se purifier si elle veut survivre' (p. 238). By aligning the thought processes of the most powerful *béké* with those of Hitler, Confiant is clearly making a

comparison between colonialism and nazism. The ‘lactification’ of the race, is argued by Fanon to be a primarily female concern in *Peau noire, masques blancs*. In his analysis of ‘la femme de couleur et le Blanc’ (pp. 33-50), Fanon refers to the preoccupation of both the *négresse* and the *mulâtresse* to ‘whiten’ the race, ‘car il faut le comprendre une fois pour toutes, il s’agit de sauver la race’ (p. 44). Here, Confiant seems to contradict Fanon, suggesting that it is not the women who are obsessed with ‘purifying’ the race, but the men, disempowering women further in a sense as he takes away their biological right to their own sexual choices.⁷⁹ Noëllise the servant is clearly considered to belong to de Maisonneuve but the latter’s daughter also seems to be another part of his property. Here, Confiant implies that de Maisonneuve is keen to demonstrate and even show off his power to Helmut, to establish himself as an important proprietor in order to validate his position as a coloniser. This depiction corresponds to Memmi’s ‘portrait of the coloniser’ and the need for the coloniser to prove that he is a ‘usurpateur’ (Memmi, p. 73)

The German prisoner-of-war and the *béké* are able to maintain their specified roles within the same house thus upholding a kind of mutual respect for one another. This respect and desire to keep their ‘honour’ is made clear by de Maisonneuve’s offer of Noëllise, his servant and even his daughter, Gervaise to Helmut. Here, the female characters are completely excluded from the masculine position of control and are constructed as mere objects. Through this

⁷⁹ The irony is, of course, that Helmut is sleeping with Arielle, the *béké*’s wife and that same evening de Maisonneuve ‘devint père (et non grand-père) d’un métis créole-allemand, bien qu’il ne sût jamais la vérité’ (NA, p. 239).

representation, *Confiant* implies that Antillean society is one in which women at all levels of colonial society are at the mercy of the men. These men are also in control of History too, and of the future of the race, while women are explicitly excluded from any power. Meanwhile, the little resistance Noëllise displays towards her treatment by the *béké* in the above quotation suggests not only that his behaviour is habitual, but also that she may have assimilated his masculine, white gaze in the way Memmi suggests is common for the colonial. Helmut's puritanical reaction portrays a sense of horror, as his switch to German implies, as if he does not want to speak the language of this sort of trade. Helmut's puritanical reaction is contrasted to the *béké*'s smoothness and easy familiarity seen in the 'mon cher', as if he is establishing complicity with Helmut.

Confiant's depiction of the different responses to and by the German to the *békée* women and to Noëllise constructs women as a medium through which the men interact. Here, we return to Loomba's identification of the female body as a 'porous frontier' through which the male defines himself. Joseph de Maisonneuve is at once a figure of mockery, because his wife is sleeping with his German 'guest', but also of revulsion because of the way he would blithely give away his daughter to meet his own ends. His attitude to Noëllise is similar; he shares none of the European's discomfort at her colour but simply sees her as another one of his possessions. For the *béké*, therefore, women are sexual objects and the German, in sleeping with Arielle de Maisonneuve, his host's wife, could arguably be said to display a similar attitude. In this depiction of colonial sexual relations, *Confiant* seems to imply that it is not only colonised men who vent their

frustration on women, as the critics above suggest, but all men. Drawing on Memmi's conclusions, Confiant indicates that it is the brutality of the colonial system that leads to the need for *all* colonial men to somehow demarcate their territory through the bodies of women. Loomba and McClintock's analysis of the condition of colonial women explains, in part, why the creolist authors choose to represent men who see the female characters as their possessions. The following analysis of the figure of the *dorlis* will examine whether this need to possess the female is always sexual, and give further consideration to the consequences of this form of violence as portrayed by the creolist authors.

The representation of the figure of the *dorlis* in the fiction of both of the creolist authors illustrates most effectively the link between women, violence and possession. The *dorlis* is a type of incubus, a magical creature in Martinican folklore who rapes women as they sleep,⁸⁰ the latter remaining unaware of their violation until they awake. Martine Coadou's sociological study of the *dorlis* phenomenon led her to conclude that in the Martinican imagination, the rape of the *dorlis* is not about a sexual act: the focus of penetration is upon ownership. An examination of this figure in texts by Confiant and Chamoiseau will also elaborate and illustrate the link between possession and sexual violence against women.

⁸⁰ Martine Coadou, (*Serpent, manitou et...dorlis: Bestiaire symbolique martiniquais* (Guadeloupe, Petit Bourg: Ibis Rouge, 2000).

In *Chronique des sept misères*,⁸¹ the protagonist, Papi is born of the rape of his mother, Héloïse, by the *dorlis* Anatole-Anatole who has fallen in love with Héloïse. When his feelings are not reciprocated, Anatole-Anatole's father initiates him into the secret methods of the *dorlis* so that he can have Héloïse without her consent. Her will is clearly not seen as important:

Appliquant sa nouvelle science de dorlis, il la pénétra en son mitan sans la réveiller, et passa sur le corps endormi huit heures délicieuses. Ses grognements, ses pleurs, ses vibrations, ses petites-morts sous le plaisir, se mêlaient au légers ronflements de sa partenaire. (CSM, p. 34)

All emphasis is on Anatole-Anatole's pleasure in these 'delicious' hours intimately spent with Héloïse who supposedly 'l'éblouit' (p. 33). Héloïse, unwittingly, becomes an unconscious object – he is able to penetrate her without even waking her up. Her passivity is emphasised by the contrast between the noises of delight he makes, mingled with the sound of her gentle snoring. The focus is all on the masculine pleasure in his secret 'invasion' of an unaware victim.⁸² It is only in the morning when she awakes that she realises what has happened as she finds herself 'meurtrie comme un fruit tombé' (p. 34) and the sheets stained with blood. Her sense of shame is evident in the way she spends

⁸¹ *Chroniques des sept misères* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986). Future quotations from this novel will be referenced as CSM.

⁸² Drawing on Spivak's analyses of the role of colonised women or 'third-world subjects', Carole Boyce-Davies refers to the difficulty for the black woman to find a place where her voice can be heard (in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* [London & New York, Routledge, 1994], pp. 152-16). This sense of 'silencing' of the female voice is therefore already being explored by feminist postcolonial critics and it is interesting to note that (once again) while the Creolist authors are deeply concerned by the condition of the Antillean male, they seem unaware of their own literal silencing of the Antillean female.

the entire day washing herself in an attempt to cleanse her sullied body of the rape. This form of humiliation of the female is also portrayed by Confiant.

In Confiant's *Eau de Café*, an entire chapter is devoted to 'L'incube de Grand Anse' (pp. 88-100), suggesting that an entire myth has been constructed around this *incube*, or *dorlis*. There are so many rapes that the community begin to wonder whether there are several *incubes* operating. The narrator refers to the 'préférence' (*EdC*, p. 89) of this *incube* for 'les jeunes filles dans la fleur de leur virginalité, sur les corps desquelles il laissait grafignages, morsures, bave et traces de sang' (*EdC*, p. 90). This description indicates the violence and even bestiality of the rapes, almost as if he is determined to leave his mark on the women. The act does not appear to be a quest for sexual satisfaction for the *incube*; instead he seems to brutalise each woman, as if he is venting some sort of rage, evident in the bitemarks and scratches he inflicts, drooling as if his body were out of control. This sense of brutality is reinforced by the youth of the girls, implying an innocence that makes the sexual violence seem all the more shocking. In a bid to prevent more rapes, the Syrian shopkeeper Ali Tanin convinces the villagers that the women must wear black pants, impenetrable to the *incube*. However, Ali's wife forgets to protect herself, and the *incube*, 'fou de rage, déchaîné par les échecs cuisants qu'il subissait partout' (*EdC*, p. 97), vents all his frustration on her and 'lui laboura le corps pendant trois heures' (p. 97). Here, Confiant's depiction of the *incube* is distinguished from Chamoiseau's by a rather different treatment, however, firstly the verb 'subissait' to describe how the *incube* feels is an interesting choice, implying that it is the *incube* who suffers, rather than the

woman. Indeed, secondly, she wakes up in the morning feeling as if she has had wonderful dreams, for which she thanks God. Moreover, 'les formes épanouies' (p. 97) of her body are noted by her husband, who also furiously sees 'la joie que tu colportes sur ta figure' (p. 98). The physical response of Mme Tanin seems completely at odds with the sexual violence which has been inflicted upon her. Whereas Héloïse in *Chronique* is overcome with horror and shame when she realises what has happened, Mme Tanin seems to have experienced immense pleasure.

Confiant's problematic representation of female satisfaction at the rape by an *incube*, or *dorlis*, is briefly commented upon by Thomas Spear who rightly identifies the unease with which this scene of rape fills the reader, arguing that 'Cette scène nourrira sans doute les fantasmes du lecteur avide de chairs interdites; le non-consentement de la femme complètement objectivée semble ajouter au plaisir'.⁸³ Indeed, Confiant's depiction of the *incube*'s rape does indeed seem to act as a kind of sexual fantasy in which the female can only be passive victim. For Ali, furious at his wife's apparent pleasure at the *incube*'s rape, throws his wife out into the streets with her 'maigres effets' (p. 98) where she ends up living in dirty squalor, 'entrant ainsi dans la confrérie des nègres dits de dernière catégorie' (*EdC*, p. 98). From this rape then, the woman loses her husband, home, livelihood and even humanity. The *incube*, on the other hand,

⁸³ Thomas Spear, 'Jouissances carnavalesques: représentations de la sexualité' in *Penser la créolité*, eds. Maryse Condé & Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris: Karthala, 1995), pp. 135-152, (p. 145). Further references to this chapter are given after quotations in the text.

continues to live in the community, and Ali Tanin becomes a well-known local figure, made wealthy by the proceeds from the sale of the black pants. The two men both have a sense of grave injustice: the *incube* because he is no longer able to rape women as and when he desires; and Ali because of his wife's dishonour to him, signified in her apparent pleasure from the rape. Both of these male characters take out their frustration on the female character, one in 'possessing' her in sexual terms and the other by 'dispossessing' her. While this episode in *Eau de Café* is obviously exaggerated and clearly intended to provoke humour at Ali's ridiculous behaviour, Ali's wife is treated as a mere possession by both men.

While the above analysis allows us to state that gender is an essential component of subjectivity and interaction with others, it is clearly heavily influenced (or perceptions and norms of it are) by the colonial system. The representation of Antillean male sexuality by the creolist authors has come under some attack. Maryse Condé criticises the recent model of Antillean novels for its 'exclusively male sexuality'.⁸⁴ James Arnold has gone further in his criticism of the creolist authors, arguing that their movement of *créolité* is not only 'masculine but masculinist'. In other words, the authors exaggerate their masculinity in an attempt to over-compensate for the 'feminisation' of the male through the process of colonisation. In other words, to combat a sense of impotency, the authors establish a model of 'aggressive heterosexual desire' (Arnold, p. 25). This treatment of women in their writing is, according to Arnold, the only way for the authors to reassert their masculinity. Lorna Milne nuances

⁸⁴ 'Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer', *Yale French Studies*, Vol. 2 (1993) 121-135 (p. 129). Further references to this chapter are given after quotations in the text.

Arnold's criticisms somewhat by pointing out that although there is 'violently predatory masculine behaviour in Chamoiseau's novels',⁸⁵ this behaviour is also punished. For example, in her analysis of the rape in *Chronique*, Milne sees it as significant that Anatole-Anatole is later killed in the middle of a rape, a kind of textual revenge for his predatory behaviour. She interprets this, and Chamoiseau's similar punishment of other sexually violent male characters to be a sign of male guilt:

Chamoiseau's aggressively over-sexed men are shown to be caught in a double trap [...] either they adopt a 'white mask', modelling their sexual behaviour on the Master and his 'stallions'; or they practice self-assertion through aggressive promiscuity. Either way, they react to their own subjugation by subjugating women. ('Sex, Gender and the Right to Write', p. 65)

Both Arnold and Milne identify the creolist authors' representation of sexual violence as a problematic one in which the female character is often subordinated. For the purposes of this thesis it is important to consider how this sexual violence impacts on human relationships in the work of the creolist authors; how they imply that it is a reproduction of violence.

⁸⁵ 'Sex, Gender and the Right to Write: Patrick Chamoiseau and the Erotics of Colonialism', in *Francophone Texts and Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Celia Britton & Michael Syrotinski (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), pp. 59-75 (p. 62).

Fictional Representations of Violence

In *Lettres créoles*, Chamoiseau and Confiant argue that ‘la domination est tout autant sexuelle qu’économique ou symbolique’ (p. 123), drawing attention to the overall oppression and the role of sexual violence within it. As a result, the authors continue, ‘le viol est, d’emblée, le modèle de la relation sexuelle de l’aire de l’américano-caraïbe’ (p. 123). Their use of the word ‘modèle’ here indicates that there is a pattern that exists that is directly related to colonialism. The creolist authors’ assertion that rape is the only sexual ‘model’ available to Antilleans explains the many instances of rape in their fictional writings, such as – amongst others – the rape of Marie-Sophie in *Texaco* (pp. 279-280); the symbolic rape and enforced prostitution of Miss Martinique in *L’Allée des soupirs* (pp. 327-328); the rape of Eau de Café in *Eau de Café* (pp. 279-281); and the rape of Anastasia in *Chronique*. Indeed the examples of sexual violence in the fictional work of both creolist authors are too numerous to explore within the confines of this thesis. I will therefore begin by examining Marie-Sophie’s rape in *Texaco* as representative of the others.

The rape of the central character Marie-Sophie represents a male Antillean *mulâtre*, Alcibiade, who uses sexual violence as a way of dealing with the frustration of his own sense of powerlessness. Marie-Sophie has been working as a maid for the politically-active *mulâtre* (and his wife) who is passionate about metropolitan France and becomes increasingly enraged with Martinique’s movement towards *négritude* and Césaire’s election as mayor. This is a huge

political blow for Alcibiade who considers the election of '*un nègre se disant de l'Afrique [...] et communiste en plus*' (T, p. 277) to be catastrophic, representing a return to the plantation fields. On the night of Césaire's success, the *mulâtre's* anger reaches a peak and he enters Marie-Sophie's room and vents his uncontrollable rage on her body. Years later, she recounts her experience to the *marqueur*:

[I]l me recouvrit, me déshabilla, et me creva d'un rein sauvage. Son corps invincible me fracassait à grands ahan, m'écartelait, me desossait, me transperçait. Il grognait d'une joie revancharde. Moi qui revenais de l'étreinte de Nelta, je basculai dans une ravine où s'embrouillaient le plaisir, la honte, la douleur, l'envie de mourir, l'envie de tuer et d'être tuée, le sentiment de l'injustice, de ne pas exister, d'être une chienne méprisée. (T, pp. 279-280)

Despite the previous difficulties and harshness that Marie-Sophie has endured, the violence of this rape shocks the unprepared reader. Its positioning in the novel at the point where she is falling in love juxtaposes its brutality with the innocence and sensuality of her feelings for Nelta. Moreover, the description of the rape through verbs such as 'crevait', 'fracassait', 'transperçait', conveys a sense of Alcibiade's determination to destroy her.

Confiant and Chamoiseau seem to suggest that this model, so closely connected with the colonial system, makes it almost possible for men and women

to enjoy loving and fulfilling relationships with one another.⁸⁶ Instead most sexual relationships between Antilleans seem to break down or be fleeting, purely physical encounters that are caricatured by Confiant.⁸⁷ This impression is also created by the lack of love and affection between characters and in the mockery that they make of 'Amour-France' (seen in, for example, Helmut's surprise that Noëllise does not know how to kiss on the lips [NA, p. 246]). This suggests that physical love amongst Antilleans was rarely gentle or an expression of mutual love but is instead more brutal, reflecting the colonial model. These representations imply that because there is no other model for Antilleans to follow, sex is frequently seen as the purely physical, often promiscuous transaction depicted by Confiant. Indeed, Confiant seems to view the sexual licentiousness of his female characters as an almost positive form of liberation. Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais provides us with a possible reason for such sexual excess in Confiant's fictional work:

⁸⁶ Their fiction rarely refers to homosexuality, still considered a taboo subject by most in the Antilles – this is a point that is commented upon by Arnold. He argues that the 'suppression of homoerotic desire' (p. 24) that began with Fanon is closely connected with the ongoing suppression of women in Antillean society because the colonised male who has been 'feminised' by the colonisers cannot conceive of himself as being gay. This level of homophobia, Arnold argues, continues to permeate Antillean fiction.

⁸⁷ Confiant has been compared to Rabelais, with his use of the carnivalesque and his vulgarity, and such scenes do indeed caricature Antillean characters. Yet, the overall effect is one of discomfort, for the reader is unsure whether such brutality can really be humorous, and one is forced to ask what sort of impact Confiant is seeking. He appears to be reinforcing the stereotypical voracious sexual appetite of Antillean women and the Antillean male virility that has also been explored by Fanon (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, pp. 51-66) to expose its ridiculousness. The horror of it all is turned by Confiant into the grotesque, as if to highlight the fact that such events should not happen in real life. This is explained by the *instituteur* in *L'Allée des soupirs*, 'Disons qu'il [le mot 'grotesque'] désigne une certaine démesure du réel insulaire. C'est d'ailleurs la disproportion entre cette demeure permanente et l'exiguïté de l'île qui crée ce grotesque' (p. 99). And so Confiant makes a direct link between the brutal origins of the island and the ongoing drama of reality on the islands.

La série des licences sexuelles [...] détruit la hiérarchie des valeurs établies en créant des voisinages nouveaux entre, les mots, les choses, les phénomènes. Elle restructure le tableau du monde, elle le matérialise et le rend charnel.⁸⁸

Using this quotation, it could be argued that the sexual excess depicted by Confiant in his novels is a way for him to set up a new order and to challenge the westernised establishment still in place. The level of exaggeration is perhaps necessary in order to break free from the old establishment. This logic is certainly evident in Confiant's preface to *Une nuit d'orgies à Saint-Pierre* by the anonymous author Effe Géache written in 1892/93. This novel focuses on the town's licentiousness, emphasising the lewd behaviour of the *mulâtres* and the wantonness of the newly-liberated slaves. For Confiant, this 'jouissance' is one that is 'saine' and which 'témoignait d'une société active, inventive, productive, heureuse en dépit de craintes inégalités, sûre d'elle-même et de son destin'.⁸⁹ However, the emphasis throughout this novel is upon the pleasure of the males and the availability of the females (all of whom work in brothels) which suggests that the liberation is heavily reliant on gender.⁹⁰ Moreover, while Confiant acknowledges that sex is often violent in Antillean society, in this text he is still able to see it as energizing: 'la violence sexuelle est l'un des éléments

⁸⁸ Mickhail Bakhtine, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, trans. Doria Olivier (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), p. 337.

⁸⁹ Effe Géache, *Une nuit d'orgies à Saint-Pierre* (Paris: La Musardine, 2000), p. xvi.

⁹⁰ Angela Carter, in her analysis of Marquis de Sade's representation of women sees the brothel as 'a closed system' where despite women's dominance, 'the economic power lies in the hands of the customers' (i.e. the men) in *The Sadean Woman* (London: Virago Press, 1979), p. 83.

fondamentaux du psychisme créole: faire l'amour revient à donner une trempe'.⁹¹

I would argue therefore that Confiant seems to align himself with the traditional view of colonised women as sexually excessive, almost 'bestial'. Again, we return to the notion that the colonial male is using the female body to claim back some sense of his own existence.

Although Chamoiseau is less cynical in his representation of male-female relationships, his fiction also has very few examples of happy Antillean couples (Estername's doomed relationship with Ninon in *Texaco*; Marie-Sophie's eventual solitude; Balthazar's unrequited love of Sarah-Anaïs-Alicia to name but a few). The pattern for all sexual relationships, the creolist authors state, is taken from the colonisers, as the *marqueur* notes in *Biblique*:

Ces assauts contre la gent féminine dévalaient l'escalier du pouvoir. Le béké commençait, le gèreux poursuivait, imité au plus près par les commandeurs et par les petits-chefs en différents travaux. Enfin, la fourmilière des journaliers agricoles se glissait dans les interstices de ces dominations, reproduisant parfois la même compulsion prédatrice envers les femmes de leur entour. (*BDG*, p. 287)

The words 'poursuivait', 'imité', 'reproduisant' all reinforce the notion that the other men are simply modelling their behaviour on that of the *béké*, and that he has established a pyramid than none of them seem to challenge. This quotation recalls Memmi's argument that the only available model for the colonised is one

⁹¹ *Le Robert* defines 'du trempe' as having energy or 'caractère', and indeed here Confiant seems to be emphasising the physical aspect of sex.

of imitation. The image of the ‘fourmillière’ again indicates that this is a tightly organised, hierarchical (male) structure where all the roles are carefully defined and rules followed. The suggestion is that the plantation is structuring men’s behaviour to such an extent that they are stuck in their designated function. All the men are connected to this ‘escalier de pouvoir’ and – by abusing the women – they believe they are getting closer to the higher levels of power. Here the sexual aspect is less concerned with possession but is focused on the interaction between the men. The impression of sexual violence is a model that stems directly from the colonial structure combined with the Antillean male’s desire to reassert his own damaged pride to provide the reasons for the prevalence of this model.

The notion that this sexual violence is a pattern emerging from any damaged and oppressed society – i.e. that it is a model – is reinforced in Confiant’s novella *La Dernière java de Mama Josépha*. The novella is significantly set outside the Antilles in a Parisian *banlieue* and reconstructs the life of a murdered Antillean woman – Mama Josépha – through the different witnesses and friends being interrogated by a fellow Antillean inspector.⁹² The following textual example implies the extent to which Confiant considers the violence of Creole society to be endemic to any dominated or colonised cultures.⁹³ When sexual violence is taken outside the physical parameters of the Antilles, the brutality and humiliation are still present. In the following extract,

⁹² This reconstruction of a person after their death is a common feature of Antillean literature (Condé, *Traversée de la mangrove* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989), Confiant, *Le Meurtre du Samedi-Gloria*).

⁹³ A point that is also made in *Biblique* through Balthazar’s countless battles on behalf of all the oppressed, such as the colonisation of Vietnam and the battle for Dien Bien Phu.

one of the suspects, a geography teacher in a ZEP school in a Parisian *banlieue*, Mlle Minouchette gives the inspector a candid account of a gang sexual assault on her. Symbolically, the assault takes place in the classroom, a strong bastion of French political, cultural and national power:

Soudain, Maxime s'est levé de son banc, a sorti un pistolet, un énorme pistolet noir, et me l'a posé sur la tempe et a déclaré, détachant chaque syllabe: "Tu nous a fait voyager avec tes cartes à la con, maintenant, nous, on va te faire faire le tour du monde des bites. Si tu bouges, t'es bonne pour la Père Lachaise. OK? (*DJMJ*, p. 92)

Maxime's menacing tone and conviction in his own strength and power seem completely misplaced – and all the more threatening – in the classroom. Physical violence is implied (in the threat of death), the weapon giving the student complete control. Minouchette is then forced to give oral sex to all the boys (the Moroccan, the Serbo-Croat and so forth) seated in her chair, submissive and dominated. The boys are enacting a fantasy in which they are imitating the cruelty which they have borne as marginal individuals in metropolitan French society. Their revenge is to violate a figure of power – the teacher. Her indignity is heightened by her seated position as she is lowered before them. Once again, it is a female character who becomes the victim, at the mercy of the male sexual fantasy. Confiant here emphasises the far-reaching damage of the colonial situation. This fictional representation suggests that any system where individuals feel frustrated and even alienated leads to this violence, as Memmi's portrayal of

the colonial relation indicates. The above example of sexual violence suggests that it is the system that creates such a pattern, not individuals. They are only imitating the pattern of violence which – as the creolist authors state – was put in place by the colonial system.

Part 3: The Propagation of Violence

In this final part of the chapter, I will focus on how Chamoiseau and Confiant portray this clear pattern of general, sexual violence as a continuous one; how it is transmitted from generation to generation. Memmi's 'portrait' of both the coloniser and the colonised argues that the violence will continue for as long as the colonial situation remains in place. For the creolist authors, the violence of colonialism seems to be perpetrated by humans, but they suggest that violence is passed on from generation to generation through memory as a kind of imprint in the Antillean mental landscape.

The authors represent this process by showing a human violence that seems to inscribe itself in the very land of the Antilles itself. The importance of the land for the creolist authors and its ability to bear witness to the past is outlined in *Lettres créoles*. In this text, the authors identify the first writing evoked in the text as that of the 'roche écrite' and the 'tracées' of the Amerindian ancestors of the Creole people, implying that it is in these ancestors' memorials that the first literary origins can be found. The notion of memorials that appears in *Lettres créoles* is perhaps surprising given the emphasis both Chamoiseau and Confiant place on their rhizomatic existence. Nevertheless, there is a keen

insistence on tracing their origins and – above all – of remembering them and marking history to ensure that it is not forgotten. The full title, *Lettres créoles – Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature de 1635-1975*, significantly contains the word ‘tracées’, highlighting the need to uncover the hidden traces of the Antillean past. The creolist authors’ insistence on the remembrance of their past and the importance of identifying Antillean roots is also made clear by the chapter title in *Eloge*: ‘La mise à jour de la mémoire vraie’ (p. 26). Here the authors identify the scattered histories of the Antillean past that are to be traced in order to reconstitute an Antillean past, ‘à cette mémoire-sable voltigée dans le paysage, dans la terre’ (*EC*, p. 38). The assertion of memory impregnated in the landscape as the only memorial remaining for Antilleans will be examined in the remainder of this chapter. The notion of mineral constructs as natural memorials to the Antillean people is embodied in the joy and peace found by the old slave in Chamoiseau’s *Esclave vieil homme* when he finally stumbles upon the ‘pierre de volcan’ (See Chapter 1, p. 72). The stone is both the slave’s place of death but also where he is comforted by the voices from the past, and thus finds a form of salvation in the uncovering of his ancestors, his past. Indeed, the anthropologist Leiris states that ‘les objets de pierre et de poterie’ are the only remnants of the artisan methods of the Carib ancestors, which are therefore ‘les témoins de leur civilisation ancienne et relèvent de la seule archéologie’.⁹⁴ These first symbols that mark the beginning of the Antillean literary voice seem to penetrate the soil itself, as if the words of the Antillean ancestors have been absorbed by the earth:

⁹⁴ Michel Leiris, *Contact de civilisations en Martinique et en Guadeloupe* (Paris: Gallimard/Unesco, 1987), p. 45.

Nos pays ont inscrit dans leur terre ces paroles brisées, éparées, partielles, qui remontent la tracée infinie d'une absence de Genèse: cette silencieuse littérature. (LC, p. 23)

This quotation, whose words end the first chapter in *Lettres créoles*, suggest that the rocks upon which their ancestors' past is written continue to be ignored. The description of the 'paroles' as 'broken', 'scattered' and 'partial' conveys a feeling of pessimism, as if it is already too late to pull the pieces back together.⁹⁵ It seems significant that the authors evoke the 'absence' of Genesis. Here the absence of genesis turns the writer, the maker of this 'silent literature', into a creator of another world. For the creolist authors then, the landscape can act as commemoration of the past, a past that differs from the one outlined by the coloniser. While it is a positive witness for the traces of their Amerindian ancestors, the slave ancestors represent a more painful past, as is evident in the traces left in the *cachot*. An examination of each author's representation of the *cachot* will enable us to explore further how the past, and especially its violence, makes its presence felt. Both authors represent the *cachot* in their fiction as one place where the violence of the past continues to affect future generations. Their literary representation of the *cachot* makes explicit the violence of the past and, above all, connects it to contemporary Antillean life. For the stones of the *cachot*

⁹⁵ It also evokes Derek Walcott's notion that Antillean art 'is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent. And this is the exact process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its "making" but its remaking', *What the Twilight says - Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998), p. 69. It is interesting that Antillean authors across the Caribbean see a similar role for literature, implying that art (poetry, literature) can be a way of healing the scars and wounds of the past. Further references to this work are given after quotations in the text.

have, in the words of Esternome in *Texaco*, ‘conservé grises des tristesses sans fond’ (*T*, p. 46).

The *cachot* was a makeshift prison for slaves who had tried to escape, or were being punished in some way. They were holes dug deep into the earth into which the slaves were thrown and left, effectively buried alive. The symbolic use of the *cachot* is clear: it reinforces the recurrent images of imprisonment. These images are associated with the originary violence aboard the slave ship, with the slaves buried alive in the dark, and is reminiscent of a tomb (and therefore all the associations of a symbolic death). Undoubtedly because of this live entombing of the slaves, the creolist authors use the *cachot* in their writings as a particularly horrific symbol of the torture that their ancestors underwent, but also as a form of memorial. It is a haunting image indicating that while other cultures have graveyards with impressive monuments in an important acknowledgement of their sufferings, there is nothing for Antilleans. All that remains is the earth itself, impregnated with the blood and sweat of their ancestors. The following textual analysis of depictions of the *cachot* – in Confiant’s *Commandeur* and in Chamoiseau’s *Biblique* – examine how its souvenir affects the characters and what this tells us about the power of remembered violence. In both cases, the *cachot* is connected with sexual violence and it seems to have a profound physical effect on the male characters in particular.

In *Commandeur*, Firmin comes across the *cachot* as he and his workers are looking for another way for the water from the canal to pass through the land.

Firmin's pain in response to this *cachot* is evident in its physical impact upon him, 'Une frissonade parcourut la raie de son dos. Ses mains se firent moites, ses lèvres s'agitèrent' (p. 275). He speaks to no-one, 'même à son épouse', of his discovery of the *cachot* because 'il ne trouvait pas de mot [...] approprié' (CS, p. 275). Firmin's inability to voice what he sees recalls Esternome's response to the *cachot* in *Texaco* in which his father was buried alive: 'il ne faut pas illustrer ces choses-là' (p. 46).⁹⁶ Firmin's way of dealing with his discovery is to cover up the wall under which the *cachot* is hidden. This action, and his refusal to tell any of the others about what he has come across, can be read as representative of the Antillean way of dealing with slavery and the past. However, Firmin is not able to forget it; he 'demeura pourtant marqué le restant de ses jours' (p. 275) by the sight of the tiny holes into which the slaves were forced, and memories of it come back to hit him and seem to trigger an intense violence in him, as is evident in his subsequent 'almost' rape of Clémencia. Seeing Clémencia by the river, Firmin is suddenly hit by the memory of the *cachot* and moves towards her: 'Il posa une main sur son épaule, avide de toucher un être humain, une chair vivante' (p. 276). Clémencia acts as an antidote then to the idea of death that is so closely connected to the *cachot*. However, she remains completely silent, and so the reader does not know whether she is consenting or not; only half-way through their love-making does she begin to shout in Creole 'Je meurs, je meurs' (p. 277) and moves her body to fit his. Firmin's desperate desire to touch another living being again symbolises his need to forget the images of death and torture that the *cachot* provoked. The interweaving narratives of the discovery of the *cachot* and

⁹⁶ See Chapter 1, p 57.

this sexual encounter link the two, indicating that Firmin's violent sexual urges seem directly linked to the *cachot*. Clémencia first of all remains in her 'posture de statue', 'ses yeux introublés' (p. 278) which act as a contrast to Firmin's violent emotions. When Firmin 'reprit ses esprits' (p. 278), he is desperate for her to leave and tells her to go immediately: 'Il ne reconnaissait pas sa propre voix qui semblait hâchée, incertaine de son intonation' (p. 278). It seems he has lost control for a few minutes and 'given in' to his desire for Clémencia, all provoked by his discovery of the *cachot*. In this episode, the brutal treatment of the slaves by the masters is associated with Firmin's violent sexual desire for Clémencia. The pattern of violence is clearly indicated but, more significantly, Firmin's violent urges seem to come from his desire to deny the past. He does not want to remember the torture inflicted upon his ancestors and has indeed covered it up; however when the memory resurfaces involuntarily, frustration overwhelms him, as is manifested in his sexual violence. Here, Confiant is deliberately depicting the link between the violence of the slavery era and twentieth century Martinique and the violence the colonised male inflicts upon the female in an attempt to vent his rage and impotency towards this past violence that *will not be forgotten*.

In Chamoiseau's *Biblique*, a similar pattern is portrayed. At this point in the novel, Balthazar is being initiated by Man L'Oubliée into the powers of the *Das*, the traditional midwives.⁹⁷ Different generations of the past converge in the birth of a baby, Bacchus, who appears to be touched by the *Malédiction* and is in the process of dying. It transpires that his mother, Jeanette-Clara-Cécile who

⁹⁷ The narrator in *Biblique* informs us that the *Da* is usually a Creole woman who may be the local midwife or have minimal (herbal and spiritual) healing powers (p. 410).

worked as an *amarreuse* on the sugar cane fields had been cornered in an abandoned stone vault in the fields by an ‘homme à peau claire’ (p. 440) where he proceeded to rape her. The traces of violent treatment of the slaves are re-enacted in the rape of Jeanette by the *gèreux*. Moreover, the roles of the *gèreux* and the *amarreuse* are constructed by the power structure of the plantation hierarchy and so this rape can be seen to represent the dysfunctional power relation, or ‘domination brutale’ described earlier. However, over time, Jeanette-Clara-Cécile goes voluntarily to the *cachot* where she repeatedly allows the *gèreux* to rape her. It seems that Jeanette has accepted the power struggle and accommodates herself to it in a way that emphasises the power of the ‘domination furtive’. Eventually she becomes pregnant and the child is born with the devastating affliction of ‘la tête fendue’ (p. 442). The *Da* is called upon to help heal the child and her first step is to visit the area of the rape and subsequent rendez-vous. There she is uncustomarily shocked as she realises the history of the place:

C’était un cachot. Une des oubliettes effrayantes où des nègres esclaves s’étaient vus dessécher dans leurs propres déjections. Leurs âmes s’étaient corrompues dans la pierre, avaient coulé dedans la terre, s’étaient muées en racines coléreuses qui brisaient les murailles et nourrissaient des branchages torturés jamais porteurs de feuilles. (BDG, p. 440)

The use of italics makes the words stand out visibly on the page, drawing attention to them. It assigns the *Da*’s words a more dramatic tone, creating a

sense of her shock at what she has come across. The violence in itself is not described in detail but the slow, harrowing deaths of the slaves can be imagined through the image of their souls decaying into the stone. The mention of their souls indicates that it was not just the slaves' bodies that suffered but their entire beings. Yet, the notion of these souls as 'corrompues' is even more disturbing, suggesting that in this imprisonment their human essence has not been able to die peacefully but instead has seeped, rotting into the stone. The violence with which the slaves were treated has 'infected' them and penetrated their bodies and souls. Moreover, the impenetrability of stone renders this image even more brutal, for it reveals the strength of the decay. The suffering of the slaves is transformed into a form of mineral in itself that melts and weaves into the earth. Although their bodies have physically disappeared, their souls have become part of the earth and the suffering seems to have transformed into 'racines coléreuses'. The image of these 'roots' venting their anger on the soil, powerful enough to destroy the walls that initially enclosed the *cachot* creates a sense of the strength of the violence and desire for vengeance. The violence of the roots seems to affect the 'branchages torturés', which are described as barren ('jamais porteurs de feuilles'), suggesting that the brutality of the past is continuing to poison subsequent generations and that the suffering of the slaves has never been appeased. The implication here is that nobody will be able to expunge the horrors that took place in the former *cachot*. This bitter sterility can be read as a metaphor for contemporary Antillean society – and even as a word of warning for Antilleans from Chamoiseau. He seems to be pointing out the impossibility of a

healthy, productive society until the painful ‘roots’ of the past have been suitably acknowledged and remembered, just as Man L’Oubliée teaches Balthazar in her many visits to these affected children. It is the landscape that displays the scars of the past, and although ‘les anciens s’efforçaient de l’enlever de leur mémoire et de celle des enfants, [...] elle était là, plus que jamais, virulente et terrible’ (p. 471). Its virulence is indeed felt in the ‘tête fendue’ of the baby Bacchus, implying that a child born in this set of circumstances is inevitably afflicted by the past, and rendered imperfect. If this episode is a metaphor, it suggests that unless the violence of the past is remembered, generations of Antilleans will continue to be afflicted and damaged by the cycle of violence. Chamoiseau suggests that the consequences of such a desire to forget the past will have an equally damaging effect on the future, leading to what Chamoiseau terms in *Ecrire*, ‘un mimétisme stérile’ (p. 18). The use of the word ‘stérile’ is significant, indicating that not only is the Creole self-silenced but also that any future outlet of expression is impossible.

The above examples from *Biblique* and from *Commandeur* suggest that the *cachot* is related to sexual violence, thus linking both to models of colonial violence. For Chamoiseau, the space of the *cachot* acts a reminder of the brutal torture of the past that will not let itself be forgotten. Confiant implies, in his representation of the *cachot*, that the memories of the past lurk here and provoke violent and intense sexual urges in the characters who find themselves there. Both authors create a link between the two sorts of violence, even if there is a chronological distinction between them. The violence of the past seems to be

embedded in the land and, despite its invisibility, continues to affect new generations of Antilleans. The outlook presented by both authors is somewhat bleak, for there seems to be no way that this cycle of violence can be broken.

The Curse of Violence

The transmission of this cycle of violence is identified by both Confiant and Chamoiseau and described by them in terms of a metaphorical infection. Slavery, the motor of the original and the colonial violence, seems to act as a pollutant, or contamination that – as the fictional depictions above imply – are to be found in the earth. As seen above, the ‘infection’, for Chamoiseau, is not simply passed from one generation to the other but is also inscribed in the roots of the land. This absorption of the past into Antillean land is one that is an important theme for both authors, as shall be examined in the next chapter. Here, what it suggests is that the violence endured by the slaves was of such intensity that it has not died with them but instead has been imprinted in the earth, emanating a negative and even destructive influence. This destructive force is constructed by Chamoiseau as a direct result of colonialism. *Man L’Oubliée* describes it as ‘une infection’: ‘*L’esclavage avait tout infecté*’ (BDG, p. 417). This ‘infection’ manifests itself in *Biblique* as a ‘malédiction’ that seems able to embed itself in human bodies, and even in the physical landscape. The image of slavery as an infection that has contaminated Antillean society from its very core is a powerful one. Mary Gallagher has identified the prevalence of illness and disease in Glissant’s work and suggests that:

Le Discours antillais sees the Caribbean situation if not as a disease in search of a cure then at least as essentially problematic, and thereby instructive, radically productive and virtually rich. Whereas the younger generation of Caribbean intellectuals have tended to concentrate far more on celebration. (Gallagher, 'Whence and whither the French Caribbean', p. 18)

In *Biblique*, however, Chamoiseau does focus on the notion of a malady that has infected Antillean society. The strength and poison of the Curse is most obviously embodied in the strand of it that has invaded the pregnant Symphorine's womb. It is highly symbolic that the curse is positioned in the very place of human conception for it points to its virulence, and suggests that it is completely embedded, growing within the foetus of the next generation. Man L'Oubliée has been called to save her as the womb is beginning to fall out, and by clapping her hands between Symphorine's legs, the womb begins to withdraw back inside her 'A dire un vieux chatrou menacée d'une eau chaude, qui se contracte et disparaît', (*BDG*, p. 424). Such a grotesque image symbolises the terrible nature of the curse, reinforcing the sense of its nasty virulence.⁹⁸

The 'search for a cure' that Glissant is seeking is provided by Chamoiseau in *Biblique*. Each time Balthazar watches Man L'Oubliée cure a victim and restore a natural harmony to the cursed place by acknowledging the past and its

⁹⁸ Chamoiseau's representation of the curse that can rip out and almost destroy the very core of the woman's body evokes the similar notion of rupture and usurpation of the body/self that took place on the ship. From within, the body is being eaten by an invading element just as the ship was swallowing and ingesting the Africans who in turn were being destroyed and eaten by the sharks

victims. She tells him, 'En perdant la mémoire on perd le monde [...] et quand on perd le monde, on perd le fil même de sa vie' (BDG, p. 471). In other words, the past has to be commemorated by Antilleans before they can rid themselves of the horrors of the past. This need for commemoration of the past is evident in another one of Man L'Oubliée's lessons to Balthazar. She takes him to a *béké* family whose land seems to be cursed, haunted by strange and violent happenings. Man L'Oubliée establishes that the stables were once used as torture chambers for the slaves. Despite the *béké*'s insistence that he has nothing to do with slavery ('Rien à voir avec l'esclavage, moi !'), it appears that once again, the violence of history is refusing to be forgotten. Man L'Oubliée gives her remedy : 'elle lui conseilla de tout vider, de racler le sol et la pierre des murailles. La matière récupérée devrait être rassemblée dans quelque chose d'honorable, et soumise à *un rituel d'hommage*' (BDG, p. 468, my emphasis). The message here is very clear: the horrors and brutalities of Antillean ancestors must not be forgotten but instead need to be honoured simply by remembering. This, Chamoiseau indicates, is the first step to a cure from the curse of the 'malédiction' of their past. Just as Man L'Oubliée's fight is against 'l'oubli' – from where her name stems – and is her only weapon against the curse, the Creolist authors' only weapon is literature to fight against the past being forgotten. The curse is represented as a silent and painless enemy that seeks to sterilise Antilleans (as its presence in Symphorine's womb implies). However, there is no obvious sign from the creolist authors that Antilleans are any closer to coming to terms with the past.

The lasting grip of colonialism is evoked in Balthazar's direct address to the young drug addicts at the beginning of *Biblique*:

Ô vous, héritiers de colons esclavagistes, oui vous, descendants de leurs victimes esclaves, vous croyez l'avoir oublié mais, dans chacune de vos cellules, ce traumatisme majeur a déposé sa marque, disait M. Balthazar Bodule-Jules: il suffit d'écouter dans vos os. (p. 58)

There is a menacing, provocative tone to this passage that is reinforced by the repeated use of the second person plural. That he directly addresses both the 'héritiers' of the colonisers and the 'descendants' of the slaves is significant. Chamoiseau seems to depict a situation in which, as Memmi's 'Portraits' indicate, both the coloniser *and* the colonised are implicated in a system that has profoundly shaped both of them. Chamoiseau's choice of words here marks out the injustice of the system: there is the privilege of inheritance for the former coloniser as the *békés* continue to own most of the land in Martinique whereas the former colonised are described as the 'victimes'. Furthermore, both the colonised and the coloniser are seen as undergoing this trauma. One might imagine that it is only the descendants of the former slaves who bear the suffering and pain of their ancestors: however, what is suggested here is that *all* descendants bear the marks of their ancestors and that, even without their awareness, this 'traumatisme majeur' remains embedded within them. The implantation of this unwanted memory in every one of their cells indicates its virulence, even as it lies dormant. Above all, in this quotation, Chamoiseau is directly involving *all* those who are

born in the Antilles in a collective drama that connects them irrevocably to their ancestors and to one another.

This 'traumatisme' is described by Chamosieau and Confiant as a form of the 'malédiction' or the 'maudition', a term that is used repeatedly throughout their fiction by both authors to designate the impact of slavery, implying that it is like a never-ending affliction on Antilleans. Chamosieau's 'malédiction' can be compared to Confiant's 'maudition'. Both are symbolised by the authors as transmitters of the lasting impact of slavery. The curse acts as the 'trace' that connects the past horrors and violence of slavery to the present. These terms indicate Chamosieau's view of its destructive effect: a dangerous infection that, as the conception of Bacchus implies (see p. 151), is at its most virulent at points of sexual violence. The 'malédiction' is most visible in women and in children (who absorbed it in the womb) where its destructive force is extreme.⁹⁹

Pipi, in *Chronique*, illustrates the effect of the curse. For him everything changes the day he finds out he is the child of a *dorlis* (i.e. when he discovers that his mother has been raped): he loses the innocence of youth. The narrator informs us that after a meeting with the *dorlis*, 'Pipi s'enfermait chaque jour un peu plus dans une sorte de tournis fixe qui l'éloignait de nous, de la vie, et, impossible véridique, de lui-même' (CSM, p. 53), implying, paradoxically, that in learning about his immediate ancestry, Pipi loses his own sense of identity. The knowledge of the violence of his conception seems to bring him closer to death

⁹⁹ It is therefore different from the 'Blesse', an Antillean phenomenon where the body is considered to be inhabited by an evil spirit – see Catherine Benoît, *Corps, jardins, mémoires* (Paris: CHRS, 2000), pp. 61-64.

himself. The intensity of its impact is such that it eventually leads him into 'sa dérade' (p. 53) which only finishes with the end of his life. Therefore in Pipi's case, the violence of his personal origins affects him only once he is explicitly aware of them. The suggestion is that the violence is not embedded within him; it only has an impact when an awareness of it is imposed on him. It also seems that Pipi is destined to end up lost, alone and wedded to 'la terre' like his gravedigger father,¹⁰⁰ swamped by the voices of the past that are transmitted to him by the ghost-slave Afoukal. Pipi's suffering is therefore similar to that which his father also endured. This repeated pattern suggests that, although Pipi does not rape anyone, there is a (self-) destruction that is passed on from one generation to the next, all of which stems from the horrors borne by their ancestors. This suggests that the violence is indeed like some sort of 'curse' or 'infection' that lies dormant until stimulated, at which point it begins to infect that particular individual. The suggestion is therefore that the system has poisoned everything and this poison is infectious.

In *Biblique* similarly, the *Da*, having come across the *cachot*, screams in horror as she realises the extent of the 'infection': 'C'est l'enfant d'un viol! avait-elle hurlé [...] Une enfant soumise à la Malédiction, car elle a été conçue en plein là-dedans!' (*BDG*, p. 440). Such fear expressed by the experienced *Da* indicates the intensity of this particular curse. The child is conceived through the sexual

¹⁰⁰ After the rape, Anatole-Anatole tries to return the following evening but is unable to rape Héloïse again because she is wearing black pants that protect her. He is so desolate that he does not return home before daylight, which means that half of his face becomes white. Milne suggests this is a kind of textual revenge for his treatment of Héloïse in *Lorna Milne*, 'Sex, Gender and the Right to Write' (p. 62). In this thesis, I interpret Anatole-Anatole's sorry end as an inevitable one for a violent, doomed existence, all related to the curse.

violence initially inflicted on her mother, and in a place that is inseminated with the tortured memories of a different violence. The double intensity of the 'mal' is therefore too potent for the *Da* to combat, 'La malédiction est trop directe pour moi, marmonnait-elle' (p. 440). The violence impregnating the *cachot*, which has rendered the earth around it sterile appears to have infected the area and whatever grows there, including the baby. This is made clear by Man L'Oubliée's explanation that the baby is dying because of a 'tête fendue':¹⁰¹ the skull is too soft and has been spilt by the 'curse'. This particular affliction seems highly symbolic. The skull could be split as a sign of weakness, as if the fragility of the child's head cannot withstand the centuries of violence that converges at the moment of his conception, for the narrator tells us that this occurs in newborn babies 'comme s'ils étaient dépositaires d'une mémoire impossible à loger' (p. 442). There are too many horrific memories that impregnate them before they are even old enough to have any personal memory and so the plates in the skull cannot form themselves properly. This reasoning furthers the impression that the ancestors will not allow themselves to be forgotten and instead are clamouring to be heard in the heads of the youngest and most innocent Antilleans. From this perspective, the 'infection' cannot be seen as an evil force but as something much more desperate. The baby could be interpreted as an allegory for all children born in the Antilles. The violence is always present because of the *malédiction* of slavery; it produces deformities in the Antillean personality and sense of self, making it difficult to form relationships, as we have seen earlier.

¹⁰¹ A similar injury is suffered by Afoukal in *Chronique*, whose 'tête fendue' was literal, in the sense that the master had split open his skull.

However, amidst this cycle of violence and the ‘curse’ of slavery, the creolist authors take one figure in their fiction to represent a possible – if sometimes desperate – means of breaking free from the pattern: the mother. In the opening paragraph of the second part to this chapter, McClintock’s evocation of Columbus’ attitude to colonising lands as the location of an ‘Edenic nipple’ is quoted, an image which suggests that the quest for land to colonise is akin to a search for an original, emblematic Mother. While it is undeniable that the creolist authors often resort to clichéd images of the maternal nature of women, the following examples suggest that they also see the maternal figure as a possible means of hope.

The biological fertility of women means that they exercise a degree of power over the production of each new generation of Antilleans. It is this power that the creolist authors assert in their fiction as a means of resisting the colonial system. The majority of the central female characters in the works of Chamoiseau and Confiant remain childless either through self-enforced sterility (abortions) or by infanticide. Therefore, one of the ways in which Antillean women are represented as resisting the role of the victim is to control their fertility and refuse to allow future generations to endure the same suffering of slavery. Indeed, none of the central characters in the fictional work of the creolist authors have children of their own. In Confiant’s work only marginal women such as Carmélise in *Le Nègre et l’amiral* reproduce. Abortions are also frequent in their novels (Marie-Sophie in *Texaco*, Philomène in *Le Nègre et l’amiral* to name just two, undergo so many illegal abortions that they become sterile). In Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*,

Marie-Sophie is left childless after the many backstreet abortions she has undergone; in *Biblique*, the closest Balthazar comes to paternity is his relationship with his niece Caroline who makes him aware of the emptiness of his childless life. Similarly, Philomène in *L'Allée des soupirs* has no children and looks after her niece Ancinelle (re-named Adélise in Morn-Pichevin). Adélise in turn (the protagonist of *Morne Pichevin*) does become pregnant but gives the child away (the significance of this will be examined in the fifth chapter). Across both *oeuvres*, the only central character with children is Firmin in *Commandeur* but he displays little interest in them, leaving their upbringing entirely in the hands of his second wife who is herself *bréhaigne*. This curious lack of children (especially given the amount of sexual activity in Confiant's novels in particular) seems too consistent to be a coincidence. I will return to this point in the fifth chapter, but in the meantime I will focus on what this implies about the human effects of colonialism. The following example from *Biblique* illustrates how the slave mother is depicted as breaking the human cycle of violence.

After his time on the slave ship, Chamoiseau's Balthazar becomes a *marron-nègre* and creeps down onto the plantations one night where he sees a woman, described simply as 'L'Accouchée', give birth. Balthazar is initially overcome with emotion and compassion in the face of the woman's courage as she gives birth alone and he imagines himself as the baby cocooned in maternal love. His identification with the new-born makes the mother's subsequent action even more unexpected:

L'accouchée serrait le bébé contre elle en un geste maternel. Elle semblait vouloir le faire rentrer dans sa poitrine, dans son cœur, dans son âme, elle le serrait, le serrait, le serrait. Balthaz se sentit oppressé. Une charge terrible lui brisait la poitrine. Il comprit flap, en un hocquet d'horreur que l'accouchée était en train de l'étouffer. D'étouffer le bébé. (*BDG*, p. 68)

There is an increasing sensation of stifling as the mother pushes the baby further into her body to the extent that the onlooker Balthazar feels 'oppressed', the crushing pain in his chest suggests that he too is being suffocated. Moreover, this sense of suffocation evokes the imprisonment of the slave, from the slave ship to the rigidity of the plantation structure. 'L'Accouchée's' desire to assimilate the baby and to make it part of her again also recalls the digestion metaphor of the ship, where the slave's identity has ceased to exist. The earlier description of the woman as a 'sculpture de douleur et de force' (p. 68) implies that this is not a cowardly action but that she is forced into this terrible act. Her pain is evident in the tears that she cannot stop, 'des larmes totales' (p. 68), but also because of the extreme sacrifice she is making by giving up her son 'au nom de la liberté' (p. 68). In a sense, the woman renounces her own life for although she does not die, she is no longer living but is simply 'désanimée dans le bloc d'une rancune totale' (p. 69). A powerful violence is occurring, but is done for paradoxically humane reasons: the mother does not want her child to be born into a life of slavery. The gentleness of her killing makes it seem like a protective, loving gesture, almost like an embrace. This gesture contrasts strongly to the sudden realisation and subsequent movement of Balthazar. The reason for his own sense of suffocation

is that Balthazar identifies with the baby: as he watches the baby being born, 'il éprouva le sentiment absurde que c'était lui qui naissait là, de cette manière obscure' (p. 68), thus transforming this one birth into a universal one. This strange process of identification with the new-born child draws the reader in, making the killing feel all the more brutal. Nevertheless, Balthazar feels sympathy and even admiration for the mother in her 'acte de guerre le plus épouvantable que je connaisse' (p. 69). With these words, Chamoiseau is depicting the woman as a warrior, going against the traditional themes of the Antillean novel as outlined by Condé where the central male character is constructed as an Antillean hero.¹⁰² Yet despite this, Balthazar's sense that any mother is *his* 'mother' is a highly gendered reaction both to women and to the world at large, and indicates a projection of the Antillean male self into the role of protagonist of the Antillean, creolist master narrative.

The mother is portrayed here in ambiguous terms: on the one hand she is sacrificing her own baby for resistance to slavery; but on the other, the murder of the child has a profoundly terrifying effect on Balthazar thus indicating that Chamoiseau also finds something frightening about her power as a killer. She is represented as the martyr for the cause of resistance against slavery, sacrificing her own flesh and blood to ensure that she will provide the *béké* with no additional workers. This role seems to be admired by the creolist authors who

¹⁰² Condé, in her list of what the West Indian literary model comprises, lists the following criterion as No. 2: 'The hero should be male, preferably of peasant origin' ('Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer', p. 125).

mention it specifically in *Lettres creoles* (p. 105). Despite this admiration, Milne makes the following important observation:

Without in any way questioning the enormous symbolic value of the 'Conteur' figure and masculine resistance to slavery, it can therefore be said that the plantation in Chamoiseau's work is also linked to a major, anxious solicitude about the fate of slave women. (Milne, 'Metaphor and Memory' p. 92)

Milne considers Chamoiseau's consideration of such female sacrifice to be a 'preoccupation' for him, and that these women are the feminine equivalent of the idolised *conteur*. Given the creolist authors' adulation of the *conteur*, the sacrificing mother is obviously held in high regard as a powerful yet dangerous symbol of resistance. This Original, mythological (as *Lettres créoles* indicates it is part of Antillean legend) killing of the infant by the mother could be seen to programme the way in which creolist authors see the female figure and indeed woman in all other circumstances, a point to which we return in detail in Chapters 4 and 5. The original Mother (or female) is a resisting, loving and self-sacrificing killer of the (male) child because of her intimate relationship with the coloniser.

Nevertheless, we identified above how the pathos with which the pain of l'Accouchée's ordeal is described emphasises the sacrifice this female character makes. While the female is granted a level of subjectivity here by taking control of her situation and refusing to submit to the will of the 'machine', this sacrifice is in itself a form of violence. Such a notion of a sacrificial violence evokes René

Girard's writings where he outlines how primitive cultures deal with violence. Girard describes how in order to break the cycle of violence and the continuous desire for vengeance and revenge, the chukchi tribe did not punish the guilty party but instead killed one of the criminal's relatives:

En immolant non le coupable mais un de ses proches, on s'écarte d'une réciprocité parfaite dont on ne veut pas parce qu'elle est trop ouvertement vengeresse. (p. 45)

It appears that the female slave, for the creolist authors, is enacting this form of sacrificial violence. She is called upon to kill the guilty man's 'proche' which in this case is of course the unborn child of the slave master. And so through these fictional representations, the male authors are able to take revenge on the colonisers without directly attacking them. In this sense, they are able to break the cycle of violence momentarily. However, this is not a productive, long-lasting means of stopping the pattern of violence because it is ultimately a destructive act; they are, after all, removing all possibilities for a future generation to be created. In the next chapter, we will look at other, more positive symbols of fertility in which the authors can move away from the violence of their past.

Chapter 3 - Fertility and Escape from Violence: the Jardin Créole

At the end of the previous chapter, we concluded that the creolist authors do not represent biological fertility as a positive way out of the ‘mécanisme de néantisation’ because the violence of the system leads mothers to a self-enforced sterility, stifling future generations of Antilleans. However, another form of fertility offers a gentler, more hopeful way out of the machine. The cultivation of land is an integral part of the Antillean past and in the Antilles, is primarily associated with the plantations. Indeed, in her anthropological and geographical study of the Martinican landscape, Christine Chivallon argues that such a focus has always underplayed alternative spaces of cultivation in the Antilles.¹⁰³ As a counterpoint, Chivallon identifies the empowering mode of cultivation that existed beyond the plantations such as the *jardin créole*, which – she argues – has always been overlooked as ‘une dimension insignificative’ (Chivallon, *Espace et Identité*, p. 27) in the Antillean landscape. The notion of exploring an alternative to the plantation opens up the possibility of breaking away from the cycle of violence outlined in the previous two chapters. The creolist authors make clear in both *Eloge* and in *Lettres créoles* that they need to combat the *domination silencieuse* (referred to by Chamoiseau) by unlocking the Creole self which has been ‘mise sous verrous’ (EC, p. 14). In order to peel away the layers that enshroud this Creole self, the authors need to find a way to access a kind of alternative past, that is not too locked in the oppressive mechanism of violence. By turning to the land, and more specifically to land cultivated by the slave-

¹⁰³ *Espace et identité à la Martinique: Paysannerie des mornes et reconquête collective 1840-1960* (Paris: CNRS, 1998).

ancestors, an alternative, more positive, way of dealing with the violence opens up. For, as Chivallon comments, the gardens represent an alternative set of origins:

Le jardin d'esclave semble avoir permis la préservation ou la consolidation d'un certain nombre de pratiques culturelles aux origines diverses attestant d'un certain savoir-faire qui n'aurait pas été improvisé aux lendemains de l'abolition de l'esclavage. (*Espace et identité à la Martinique*, p. 192)

This third chapter will examine the creolist authors' representation of the *jardin créole* to see whether it is constructed as a symbol of fertility in the face of the sterilising violence of the past.¹⁰⁴

In his analysis of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, David Lowenstein argues that there is a strong European tradition of depicting the garden as 'mythic paradis[e]'.¹⁰⁵ He argues that this tradition begins with manifestations of Classical and Biblical gardens and that the motif recurs in landmarks like Dante, where we find Paradise at the top of Mount Purgatory (Lowenstein, p. 83). The continuing association between literary gardens and paradise is also identified by Oscar Haac in his examination of Voltaire's *Candide*, which leads him to conclude that Pangloss's garden is a place that comes closer to the 'ideal' than any Eldorado and is ultimately a place that provides 'hope' for the hero Candide in the face of

¹⁰⁴ The meaning of 'sterility' within the context of this thesis is outlined in the Introduction, p. 14.

¹⁰⁵ David Lowenstein, *Milton's Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 83.

the ‘disillusionment’ and ‘injustice’ borne by the other characters.¹⁰⁶ While this thesis cannot invoke a detailed discussion of such a lengthy and imposing literary tradition, the notion of the garden not only as a signifier for some sort of prelapsarian Origin, but also as a place of ‘hope’, is the starting point for this chapter. I will examine whether – in the works of Chamoiseau and Confiant – the *jardin créole* is also depicted as a place of hope and even possible independence.

Part 1: The Garden as Anti-Plantation

During the plantation era, the *jardins créoles* were tiny allotments of land granted to the slaves by their masters where the former could grow their own small supply of vegetables and plants. They were usually situated outside the plantation, scattered up on the hillside or down in the valley. The physical positioning of the gardens is important for the purposes of our study because we have in these *jardins* a space that is not restricted or confined by the plantation. The masters encouraged this practice, for it occupied the slaves’ (minimal) leisure time and thus prevented them from gathering together to foment possible rebellions. More importantly, however, it meant that the masters were able to provide the slaves with a limited amount of food since the slaves could supplement their rations from their gardens, a fact that leads one museum brochure to conclude that ‘il [le jardin] est devenu le moyen économique d’adaptation et même de résistance de la population rurale face aux exigences du fonctionnement économique globale.’¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Oscar. A. Haac, ‘Candide; or Comedy in Utopia’ in *Approaches to Teaching Voltaire’s Candide*, edited by Renée Waldinger (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1987).

¹⁰⁷ Visitor’s guide to the Ecomusée de Martinique (2001), p. 62.

This emphasis on the economic importance of the garden seems to correspond to a perspective underlined by Glissant, who draws attention to the *jardin créole* as one of the features of ‘une économie de survie’ (Glissant, *Discours*, p. 114) that marks out Antilleans as a ‘peuple rusé’ (*Ibid.*, p. 114). Such a description suggests that the *jardin créoles* are also associated with a form of resistance to the complete domination of the colonial powers, a resistance that comes from the actual physical locations of the gardens. Indeed, this view seems underpinned by a form of oppositional symmetry that occurs here between the planting carried out by the slave on the plantations on the one hand; and in the garden on the other, where the slave becomes the planter himself. For, as the anthropologist Catherine Benoît points out, the garden is also ‘la première forme d’appropriation et de construction du territoire pour les esclaves’.¹⁰⁸ Her use of the word ‘appropriation’ highlights the notion that this was the first chance for the slaves to lay claim to the land and to make it theirs. In this sense, the garden was the first place where – through the process of planting and cultivating – the slaves could root themselves in the Antilles. Similarly, Chivallon’s positive consideration of the *jardin créole* comes from her vision of the power of the land as a whole.¹⁰⁹ In her analysis of the representation of ‘la terre nourricière’ in Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*, she argues that ‘le pivot de la plus élémentaire des libertés se trouve à travers la maîtrise des ressources les plus essentielles à la vie’ (Chivallon, ‘Eloge de la ‘spatialité’’, p. 117). Her emphasis on the freedom that comes from being

¹⁰⁸ *Corps, jardins, mémoires* (Paris: CHRS, 2000), p. 97.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Eloge de la ‘spatialité’: conceptions des relations à l’espace et identité créole chez Patrick Chamoiseau’, *L’Espace Géographique*, 2 (1996), 113-125 (p.117).

able to produce by and for oneself highlights the empowering aspect of cultivating the land – and by extension the *jardin créole*, a point to which Benoît also alludes. The previous two chapters have underlined the creolist authors' representation of the continual enforced passivity of Antilleans since the time of slavery onwards. The authors imply that Antilleans have never been able to take control of their destiny or to take charge of their own history. In the cultivation of the land, however it would appear that they see here a means for Antilleans to oppose the colonial structure; their *jardin créole* may be, therefore, the first sign of 'hope' for a way out of a seemingly endless cycle of violence and passivity.

Given the important role of the *jardin créole* identified above, it is surprising that there has been little work carried out by literary academics on the importance of the *jardin créole*, either as a space for assertion of creoleness, or as a resistance to Europeanisation.¹¹⁰ In one of the rare discussions of the phenomenon, Mary Gallagher draws attention to the *jardin créole* in her analysis of Simone Schwarz-Bart's novel *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1972). Gallagher considers the garden to be above all an oppositional place and her examination of the one cultivated by the protagonist Télumée leads her to conclude that it is:

An alternative not just to the plantation, but also to the Frenchification and implied self-alienation of the town. Télumée's garden, like the plots

¹¹⁰ It is nevertheless a Creole space that is increasingly becoming of interest to academics as is evident in the articles mentioned in this chapter by Christine Chivallon, Renée Gosson and Ronnie Scharfman.

cultivated on the hills or mornes by the descendents of the *marrons*, is an empowering and organic anti-plantation founded on love and solidarity.

(*Soundings in French Caribbean Writing*, p. 165)

The emphasis here is on the contrast between the increasingly urbanised and the rural parts of the island, the latter being perceived as less assimilated into metropolitan French culture. The *jardin créole* is seen as a symbol of resistance because of its connection to the *marrons*, the rebels of the slavery era who broke free from the plantations and forged their own communities outside the colonial system. Recent critical analysis of the fictional representation of a *jardin créole* in Chamoiseau's *Chronique des sept misères* and Confiant's *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* indicate that Gallagher's interpretation of the garden as an 'anti-plantation' in Schwarz-Bart could equally be applied to works by the creolist authors, as will be explored below. Indeed, in their jointly written text, *Lettres créoles*, Chamoiseau and Confiant imagine the importance of the *jardin créole* for the slave and paint an image that seems to correspond with Gallagher's definition. Rather than naming the 'garden' in the following extract, they place emphasis on the activity of planting:

Pour lui-même, il cultive son bout de terre. Pour lui-même, il plante par-ci par-là dans le fond des bas-bois, il se loue de-ci de-là au gré des ses dimanches et de ses talents. Cette production, qui lui permet de combattre la famine, d'améliorer son présent ou, parfois, son avenir, structure la part de son existence qui échappe au maître. (*LC*, p. 86)

Despite the initial mention of 'son bout de terre', 'planter par-ci par-là' suggests little secret 'caches' of plants 'here and there' in the woods rather than what we usually imagine a garden to be. In other words, here the creolist authors are referring not to the organised space of the European-style garden (or plantation) but to an *apparently* unstructured planting 'par-ci par-là' which adds to our impression both of a procedure that is 'rusé' (Glissant) and of an activity that is (like the slaves doing odd jobs for money) structurally opposed to European practice and especially to the regimented, and ordered plantation. The lack of structure to the slave's planting contrasts with the rigidity of the work on the plantation, implying that the garden is a completely oppositional place to the plantation. The imagined pleasure that this emblematic slave derives from the *jardin créole* is described by the creolist authors with a particular fondness and affection. Above all, the slave's work in the garden is 'Pour lui-même'. The repetition of this phrase emphasises the fact that the slave is not working for the master but is cultivating the land for his own purposes. Like Benoît's anthropological description of the *jardin créole* as the first place where the slaves could appropriate the land for themselves, in this imagined role of the *jardin créole* (or its apparently unstructured equivalent), the creolist authors draw attention to the empowering nature of the garden. Yet what is perhaps most significant in this extract from *Lettres créoles* is that the garden allows the slave a part of his existence 'qui échappe au maître'. The use of the word 'échappe' here suggests that the slave is somehow slipping away from the grasp of the master and so the garden is linked to *marronnage*, the first and most radical means of

resisting complete domination by the colonial authorities. However, unlike the more violent *marronnage*,¹¹¹ the garden offers a more peaceful escape, an important difference in the context of this thesis. Like Glissant, the creolist authors seem to consider the *jardin créole* as the slaves' way of ensuring their own *survie* and to eke out an existence that is separate from the one thrust upon them by the master and the entire colonial structure. In this sense, the *jardin créole* seems to contain the first seeds of an opposition to the colonial power that is not violent but is instead highly positive and empowering.

My analysis begins with two fictional representations of a *jardin créole*, from Confiant's *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* and Chamoiseau's *Chronique des sept misères*. In both of these novels, the male protagonist finds himself in a *jardin créole* that is extremely fertile and productive. The garden episodes in each text provide the protagonist with a mini-oasis of happiness amidst an otherwise overwhelming sense of poverty and misery: *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* is a novel structured around the lives and misfortunes of the inhabitants of the *quartier* Morne Pichevin, while Chamoiseau's *Chronique* provides a fictional account of the poverty of the *driveurs* and *petit djobeurs*, referred to in *Eloge* as '[d]es héros

¹¹¹ The *marrons* were the slaves who escaped from the plantation and hid up in the *mornes*, founding their own communities beyond the plantation system. Both Richard D.E. Burton, *Le Roman Marron: Etudes sur la littérature martiniquaise contemporaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997) and Marie-Christine Rochmann, *L'Esclave fugitif dans la littérature antillaise* (Paris: Karthala, 2000) identify the mythical importance of the figure of the *marron* for Antilleans. However, as Milne ('The *marron* and the *marqueur*', p. 63) has noted, Chamoiseau's representation of the *marron* changes in *L'Esclave vieil homme* for the old slave is not the sort of heroic figure usually associated with the mythical warrior proportions of the *marron* figure in the Antilles. I believe it is important to note that the old slave 'décide donc de s'en aller, non pas de marronner, mais d'aller' (*EVHM*, p. 54). This implies that 'marronner' is somehow more negative than the freedom implied in 'aller'. The notion that 'marronner' is a sort of fleeing is also made in *Lettres créoles* where the creolist authors describe how the *marrons* 's'enfui[ent]' (p. 41), indicating that this was not a positive action.

anonymes' (p. 40). The male protagonist in each novel is indeed one such 'héro': both Rigobert in *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* and Pipi in *Chronique* lead similar existences as *djobeurs*. Such an uncertain and peripatetic way of living and the contentment each protagonist finds in the momentary stability of the *jardin créole* mark out very strongly the sense of a haven that each character experiences in his garden.

For both Pipi and Rigobert, the garden is a completely new and different environment from their habitual urban one. Through the garden, each character begins to learn about his natural Creole environment away from the urbanised setting of *L'En-ville*. The contrast is marked in *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* by the unfamiliarity of the plants and vegetation to Rigobert as indicated in the description of the vast array of plants and vegetables tended to by Celle:

Un jardin créole si bien entretenu et si productif qu'il ne parvint pas à dénombrer les centaines d'espèces qu'elle y avait fait pousser dans un savant entrelacement. (*NA*, p. 278)

Celle introduces Rigobert to the nature around him and, in contrast to his usual mockery of the 'campagnards' who arrived in town to sell their produce 'dut admettre qu'il s'était trompé: même à la ville, il était possible de se nourrir si l'on appliquait les méthodes de Celle-qui-n'a-pas-son-pareil' (*NA*, p. 278). For the first time, he has become aware of the possibilities that the land can provide. A similar association between the garden and food is made in *Chronique* for it is the hunger of the children that motivates Pipi into planting. He seeks out a 'tribe' of

Rastas in the forest, ‘avide de secrets que la terre leur confiait’ (CSM, p. 195) and here the use of the word ‘avide’ reinforces the sense of hunger that seems to prevail.¹¹² For both Rigobert and Pipi, the process of learning about planting and growing food enriches their knowledge about the vital resources afforded by Antillean nature. However the repeated phrase ‘pour lui-même’ from *Lettres Créoles* suggests that the creolist authors believe this particular form of cultivation teaches more about the land’s potential to help Antilleans live independently and no longer be forced to rely on the master. The experience both Pipi and Rigobert undergo in the *jardin créole* is thus one that is positive and enriching. This aspect of these fictional depictions correlates with the sense of empowerment associated with the *jardin créole* referred to by both Gallagher and Benoît. The notion of the garden then as an ‘anti-plantation’ comes across strongly: its initial unfamiliarity to the urbanised Rigobert and Pipi mark it out as a Creole place (as opposed to a French one), a point supported by the fact that it is also completely removed from the colonial structure. Celle’s very name – Celle-qui-n’a-pas-son-pareil – identifies her difference from others, while Pipi’s assistance from the Rastas also indicates the non-colonial character of the teaching he receives. Therefore each character’s horticultural education takes place – both physically and culturally – beyond the limits of the plantation. The sense of protection from a hostile – colonial – world is heightened by the happy domestic situation which is part of the garden episode for both Pipi and Rigobert. I will return to this point towards the end of the chapter but what is important to note here is that this is the only moment in each novel where the protagonist

¹¹² This thematic, which we have already observed in Chapter 1, recurs here

enjoys a semblance of family life in a happy, fulfilling relationship. Both Rigobert and Pipi are ‘rescued’ from danger by a female character: Rigobert has fled Morne Pichevin where he is wanted by the German soldiers and comes to a rural village up in the hills where he is taken in by a beautiful *négresse* – Celle-qui-n’a-pas-son-pareil – and briefly lives a ‘bonheur exceptionnel’ (*NA*, p. 280); Pipi is on the brink of death and starvation when he is taken in by Marguerite Jupiter who soon becomes his lover. His cultivation of the garden represents a brief period of stability as he lives with and provides for Marguerite Jupiter and her sixteen children.¹¹³ In these portrayals, Confiant and Chamoiseau seem to imply that beyond the literal confines of the damaging colonial structure examined in the previous chapters, normal and happy human relationships are possible.

What is most interesting about the fictional representations above is the fertility of the gardens and the emphasis both Confiant and Chamoiseau place on the abundance of produce cultivated in each. For example, the narrator describes Celle’s garden as ‘si productif’ (*NA*, p. 278) and the abundance of Pipi’s cultivation is evident in the amount of detail with which the narrator describes it and the reaction of the neighbours who ‘ouvraient grand les yeux sur ce ouéléélé qui encerclait la case de Jupiter’ (*CSM*, p. 197). The lush abundance of the garden in each text is emphasised by the author and such deliberate hyperbole suggests that this fertility is important. Renée Gosson’s analysis of *Chronique* considers the famed abundance of Pipi’s garden to be further evidence of its symbol as a

¹¹³ This link between Pipi’s sexual life and the fecundity of the garden is a significant one that will be examined below.

place of resistance for Creole culture,¹¹⁴ arguing that it ‘reminds his country of its productive past and possibility of economic and political autonomy’ (Gosson, p. 224). Gosson then sees in the garden a representation of the *potential* for independence and freedom from the restraints of the colonial authorities. It is certainly undeniable that the garden provides Pipi, the family of Marguerite Jupiter and even his former neighbours in the market, with a miraculous quantity of produce.

The remarkable nature of the garden serves moreover to emphasise its idealised nature. Like the garden encountered by Rigobert, it represents a momentary oasis of self-fulfilment and happiness but one that seems unconnected to the difficulty of the characters’ otherwise solitary, erratic existence.¹¹⁵ The high productivity of Celle’s garden, on the other hand, is interpreted by Ronnie Scharfman in a similar way. For her, the fertile abundance of the hidden *jardin créole* as a place of momentary refuge acts as a contrast to the famine in the town. She sees in the garden an oppositional place to the town (controlled by the metropolitan authorities), an alternative space that is constructed as a haven of literal self-sufficiency. However, one is forced to ask why, if these gardens are indeed places of such hope and a model for Antillean self-sustenance, each *jardin créole* collapses. In order to answer this question, I will examine more closely the reasons for the destruction of each garden.

¹¹⁴ Renée K. Gosson, ‘For What the Land Tells: An Ecocritical Approach to Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Chronicle of Seven Sorrows*’, *Callaloo* 26.1 (2003) 219-234

¹¹⁵ Like Pipi, Rigobert’s lack of rootedness in his existence as a ‘djobeur’ makes him an equally unlikely character to be attracted to the plants and cultivation of a garden.

In *Le Nègre et l'Amiral*, the arrival of German soldiers and their destruction of the gardens (the entire community is robbed of its produce) brings Rigobert's brief spell of happiness to an abrupt end. The villagers blame him for this invasion ('ta venue nous a amené la pire des emmerdations. Jamais les soldats ne montaient aussi haut pour voler les légumes des gens' [NA, p. 281]) and he is ordered to go by Celle. The destruction of the garden is therefore synonymous with the end of his relationship and period of *bonheur* experienced in the village, the 'rêve tout debout' (p. 281). Although Celle's garden is destroyed by the Germans, not by colonial authorities, the German soldiers are only on the island because of France's war. In the same way, Pipi's garden is also destroyed by the intrusion of 'outsiders', attracted by the success of his garden. The local authorities – under the charge of Aimé Césaire –¹¹⁶ want to get involved and so a group of 'nègres botanistes ingénieurs agronomes' (p. 202) are sent in to the garden in an attempt to record Pipi's methods and to reproduce his productivity on a large scale. Although these 'savants' (p. 204) are *nègres*, their description as 'ingénieurs' and so forth marks them out as educated professionals, culturally metropolitan and thus removed from their Creole roots, symbolised by the fact that they try to impose their knowledge on Pipi '[d]ans un français redoutable' (p. 202). However, the more Pipi's garden becomes measured and

¹¹⁶ As the architect of *départementalisation*, Césaire is depicted by Chamoiseau in *Chronique* as responsible for the terrible decline of Pipi's (and indeed Martinique's) way of life, see pp. 134-140. The effect of *départementalisation* is described in even more dramatic terms in *Ecrire*, where Chamoiseau states that 'la départementalisation nous stérilisa' (p. 224), including *all* Antilleans in this assertion.

controlled, the less it produces, until it has become a scene of complete devastation:

Les plantes avaient noirci. Les arbres demeuraient stériles comme des papayers mâles. Les fruits miraculés se racornissaient comme des cacas de lapin. Avant l'heure, infestées et verdâtres, les racines sortaient d'elle-mêmes. Une odeur de désolation végétale empuantit le quartier. (CSM, p. 204)

The images here contrast strongly with the fertile vegetation described a few pages previously. The lushness has disappeared, replaced by rotting vegetation and plants unable to grow. All hope that was contained in the success of this garden has gone, a sense intensified by the 'odeur de désolation'. Indeed, the images in this quotation are very similar to those described in *Biblique* in the cursed area surrounding the *cachot* (Chapter 2, pp. 42-43). These images, closely related to colonialism – or at least to metropolitan values – seem more concerned with violence and sterility than any potential hope that the analysis of the *jardin créole* seems to offer so far.

Gosson argues that Pipi's garden is eventually destroyed by the introduction of 'French assimilation in the form of agronomical standardization and the French language itself' (p. 228), a valid reading of the episode. I would also argue that the collapse and internal destruction of Pipi's *jardin créole* can be seen as a metaphor for Chamoiseau's view of Antillean politics and indeed of contemporary Antillean society. This depiction implies a contempt for Césaire (in

his political role) and for his party: they seem mere puppets of the red tape administration associated with metropolitan France, as is seen in the text's reference to the numerous reports filled in by the scientists (*CSM*, pp. 203-204). These people fail to recognise the value of Pipi's garden because of their need to find mascots to parade for their own political gain. A moral lesson is contained here for them all. It appears that Antillean society will not be able to be self-sufficient until it has rid itself both of parochial idealists and the crushing weight of French administration and technology. Gosson goes further in her analysis, arguing that it is the French language that eventually sterilises the garden. Pipi 'loses' his skills when he is forced to express them in French, a process he finds impossible, 'Pipi is ultimately as much a victim of the imposed pesticides as he is of the linguistic system, which, like pesticides, seeks to tame and reduce the incomprehensible into comprehensible morsels' (Gosson, p. 230).¹¹⁷ What is emphasised in Gosson's reading of Pipi's garden is the artificiality of the French system in this environment. Pipi's cultivation of the Creole natural world is successful until the 'outside' force of French is imposed upon it. The interference of the (former) colonial forces seems to disconnect Pipi from his roots, leaving him alienated and alone.

The creolist authors' fictional representations of the *jardin créole* suggest that on one level, possibilities for self-sustenance, both real and metaphorical, are

¹¹⁷ Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux considers this episode to demonstrate precisely the openness of Creole, 'Pipi's language allows Chamoiseau to indulge in play' in 'Creole in the French Caribbean Novel of the 1990s: From Reality to Myth?', in the *Francophone Caribbean Today: Literature, Language, and Culture* eds. Gertrud Aub-Buscher & Beverly Ormerod Noakes (Mona, Jamaica: The University of West Indies Press, 2003), pp. 82-97. However, given the link established between the imposition of French, and the destruction of the garden, I find Gosson's interpretation more convincing.

to be found in the appropriation and cultivation of the Antillean land. It appears that as long as the garden is in a hidden village and remains untouched by external, European influences, it is lush, fertile and happy, like paradise in fact. However, when each garden comes into contact with the outside world, it collapses. Both garden episodes contain a strong moral tone, the implication being that if Antilleans turn to their own culture to nourish and cultivate all the different elements that constitute them, they will be rewarded with feelings of self-satisfaction and happiness. However, the eventual (and almost inevitable) destruction of the gardens paints a relatively pessimistic view about the Antillean future for it suggests that long-lasting independence is still unattainable since the powerful economic and cultural grip of Europe is too strong. While the *jardin créole* can be seen as a momentary break from the restrictions of the colonial system, it is not powerful enough to withstand its far-reaching tentacles. Both of these gardens therefore do not seem to provide a permanent opening for Creole identity where it can continue to survive free from French (and European) violence and domination. The destruction of the *jardin créole* is systematically caused by interference from the modern world as the character comes to realise that interference from the external world is inevitable. In this sense, the garden cannot be construed as a strong place of resistance, or even as a lasting 'anti-plantation'.

Part 2: The Garden as Symbol

So far, emphasis has been on the empowering nature of the *jardin créole* because of its possibility for self-sustenance. However, in his brief outline of the significance of the *jardin créole*, Glissant also draws attention to the superstition or 'le geste magique' (Glissant, *Discours*, p. 115) that each gardener uses, often to protect his garden from any malevolence from neighbours. Glissant highlights the different *gestes* used by each one to demonstrate that this is not a practice that unites the community but instead one that divides it (*Ibid.*, p. 115). This practice creates the impression that each garden is its own self-contained unit governed by unknown forces. Benoît's anthropological analysis of the function of the garden in Guadeloupean society has examined further its mystical aspect and refers to the garden as 'une espèce de protection où les forces de la nature sont maîtrisées' (Benoît, p. 97). However, she continues that 'Ce n'est pas tant le paysage qui est hostile, mais les forces qui le traversent, l'habitent ou le peuplent' (*Ibid.*, p. 97). This reading highlights the beliefs surrounding Antillean nature that continue to be adhered to by the population of the islands. The next part of this chapter will explore this idea further and analyse to what extent the fictional gardens are portrayed by the creolist authors as a means of accessing an imagined, mythologised past conceived as a time of innocence and contentment preceding the arrival of the colonisers, and functioning in literature as an allegorical space that symbolises a lost paradise destroyed by colonisation.

The connection between the *jardin créole* and paradise is regularly drawn by Chamoiseau and Confiant. In *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* when Rigobert first sees Celle, he is 'saisi du haut-mal' (NA, p. 275) by this 'vision de paradis terrestre' (p. 275). The use of the word *paradis* immediately suggests that Celle's beauty is like Eve's, the original model of beauty, a sense that is heightened by Rigobert's later impression of her 'corps de déesse' (p. 276). The reader therefore has the impression that the garden tended by Celle is a sacred place. The paradisiacal nature of the garden is also emphasised by the amazing fertility of Celle's garden, described by Scharfman as a 'paradise of abundance',¹¹⁸ that is aptly located 'up in the mornes' (p. 130). Significantly, the physical positioning of the garden up high in the hills equates it to a notion of freedom because of the links to *marronnage* but it also sets it physically apart from the plantation and away from the urban area of the island but also – more importantly – elevates it, literally into a piece of earthly heaven.

In Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, too, Esternome decides that to take his beloved Ninon away from the dangers of both the towns and the plantation in the uneasy period around the time of Abolition, they must take to the hills telling her that, 'Là-haut la vie sera à nous, deux innocents au paradis, et la vie va monter des ignames tigées dans notre jardin.' (T, p. 138). Again, the use of the word 'paradis' indicates that Esternome's image of this place is mythological. Esternome's imaginary paradise reads as the fantasy of 'deux innocents' and the emphasis is

¹¹⁸ Ronnie Scharfman, ' "Créolité" is/as Resistance: Raphaël Confiant's *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* ' in *Penser la créolité*, eds. Maryse Condé & Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris: Karthala, 1995), pp. 125-134 (p. 130).

on the purity of their relationship, almost childlike in its hopeful dreams. Moreover, it is the place where Esternome feels like a ‘gouverneur des mornes’ (p. 151) and so seems to make the final transformation from slave to subject of his own destiny. This sense of rebirth is heightened by his repeated, affirmative use of the word ‘Je’: ‘Je ceci. Je cela [...] Moi je sais. Je. Je. Je.’ (p.151).¹¹⁹ The increasing awareness of self displayed by Esternome comes from the building of ‘Noutéka’, implying that a new beginning is being created. Indeed, the paradisiacal episode of ‘Noutéka’ reads a little like a fairytale story where the small hidden community is able to forge its own *quartier* up on the hills that seems very similar to the one found by Rigobert in *Le Nègre et l’Amiral*.¹²⁰

Another example of this earthly paradise is to be found in Confiant’s *Nuée ardente* where the *Jardin Botanique* in the centre of Saint-Pierre is introduced to the reader as ‘un lieu presque sacré, un véritable sanctuaire’ (*NuA*, p. 51). This description recalls Esternome’s vision of ‘Noutéka’ except that it is located in the centre of the town, rather than up in the hills. This *jardin* is not a source of physical nourishment or anything as functional but instead ‘abrite les amours naissantes, les réconciliations inespérées, les détresses et les exaltations de toutes sortes’ (*NuA*, p. 51). It is therefore constructed as a more spiritual and emotional place, providing respite in the daily struggles of the town’s inhabitants, as do their respective gardens in a more radical fashion for Rigobert and Pipi. As in

¹¹⁹ This rebirth of a slave in the isolation of nature is also demonstrated in Chamoiseau’s *L’Esclave vieil homme et le molosse*, symbolised in a switch to the ‘Je’. This point is analysed in detail by Milne (‘The *marron* and the *marqueur*’, p. 71).

¹²⁰ Esternome outlines the difference between the freedom of *quartiers d’en haut*, because of their distance from the plantation and the control of the béké, and the *quatriers d’en bas* which are too close to the plantations ever to be free from their influence and misery.

‘Noutéka’, biblical associations with the garden, this ‘endroit béni des dieux’ (p. 51), create a tone of reverence, as if the garden is a sort of paradise on earth which shelters the characters from violence and uncertainty everywhere else.

These references to gardens as a mythical paradise inevitably connote the biblical Garden of Eden, an association which emerges primarily from their construction as places of innocence and purity. Ronnie Scharfman, in her analysis of Confiant’s *jardin créole* in *Le Nègre et l’Amiral*, refers to this aspect and sees Rigobert ‘*like a latter-day Adam* [who] learns to name a whole new world, cultivated, unimaginably until now, *by this Eve* [Celle]. (Scharfman, p. 130, my emphasis). The likening of Rigobert to Adam (literally, the first man and progenitor of the human race) implies that Rigobert represents the first of a new kind of Antillean, a notion to which I will return shortly. As avatars of Adam and Eve, Rigobert and Celle enjoy a sensuous relationship which, however, only exists within the boundaries of the *jardin créole*, as if it were their own Eden. For example, the first time they make love is ‘en bordage du jardin créole, plus enlacés que les plantes qui y levaient’ (NA, p. 278). This sensuality contrasts strongly to Rigobert’s habitual crude sexual fantasies,¹²¹ and makes his sexual relationship with Celle seem pure and innocent, like that between Adam and Eve before the Fall. Indeed, if we take all the fictional depictions of a *jardin créole* referred to above, each are places of sensual encounters that represent a brief time

¹²¹ For example, the opening pages of the novel describes Rigobert’s daily masturbation over the photograph of an actress cut from a magazine that hang above his bed, ‘juste avant d’avalier son bol de café et les jets de sperme qu’il déchargeait dessinaient des sortes d’astres couleur opale sur le plancher qu’il ne balayait qu’une fois par an’ (pp. 13-14). Such crude images contrast with his relationship with Celle, where even just briefly he is part of an equal, happy couple rather than fantasising over (presumably Western) actresses.

of happiness and even innocence for Pipi and Marguerite in *Chronique*; Esternome and Ninon in *Texaco* and even Edmée and Danglemont in *Nuée ardente* (although here no sex takes place in the garden, just sexual desire). There is of course a long-standing association between sex and cultivation of the land that has been explored by Eliade, who states that 'The assimilation of the sexual act to agricultural work is frequent in numerous cultures' (*The Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 26). However, as the anthropologist of religion Mircea Eliade also points out, this was because of a perceived link between nature and female fertility. This apparent link is not represented in the fictional depictions examined above. For example, the fertility of the garden in *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* and *Chronique* is not mirrored by the fertility in the human sexual relationships. Celle is described as an older woman beyond the age of childbirth, and although Marguerite has sixteen children, clearly indicating her fertility, neither of these sexual relationships leads to the birth of children, despite the apparent fecundity of the earth that surrounds them. On the one hand, the lack of children emphasises the innocence of the sex that takes place in the garden and also makes the *jardin créole* seem all the more similar to a Garden of Eden, for Adam and Eve did not have any children either during their time in the garden. On the other hand, the garden's fertility seems to act as a kind of vicarious substitute for the woman's. Attention is thus drawn to the lack of human fertility, implying that despite the happiness contained within the garden, the future does not lie there. The creolist authors then seem to emphasise the purity of any sexual relationships that takes place in the garden, wanting it to appear as a brief time of happiness but

especially of innocence. Yet there is also a sense that this non-reproductive sex turns the garden into a self-contained unit that is somehow separated from daily life and that has no bearing on 'reality'. By describing the gardens in paradisiacal terms, the authors designate a space that is not so much oppositional as mythological: it is an imagined space outside time and history. The *jardin créole* in the works of Confiant and Chamoiseau can be seen as a projected fantasy or an illusion that represents happiness but that is also attended by sterility (in human terms). This over-riding sterility implies that it is not in some sort of return to paradise that Antilleans will find the potential for an independent future but instead that the garden represents an imaginary, idealised past that has no future.

In the previous part of this chapter, the violent destruction of the gardens of Pipi and of Celle are read as a metaphor for the impossibility of Antillean self-sustenance given the ongoing domination of metropolitan France. However, if we continue to explore the notion of the garden as a mythological Eden, this interpretation can be helpfully supplemented. Eliade talks of the defining moment in *all* cultures of the 'paradise lost', the point at which its people become 'fallen men' (*Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, p. 47). This 'paradise lost' is then transformed into a myth that is continually revisited and remembered with such yearning that it is described by Eliade as a 'longing for the conditions of Eden' (*Ibid.*, p. 42). Eliade makes the important point that during the process of colonisation, 17th century Westerners believed they had found their lost paradise in the land of the 'savages'. What the Westerners experienced as paradise, however, was experienced as 'fallen' for the 'savages' (*Ibid*, p. 47). Eliade's

discussion of this universal mythological structure seems to describe in many ways the Antillean experience of colonisation, and the terms of his argument in particular seem especially relevant to this chapter. The Garden of Eden is one explanation for the origins of man and represents the time of innocence and purity before the Fall, the paradisiacal associations of the *jardin créole* that we have uncovered here suggest that this anti-plantation can also be seen as an ante-plantation. It is depicted by the creolist authors as a place of innocence that existed before the ‘fall’ that in the case of the fictional representations above is the often violent arrival of the colonial power in one form or another.

If we return to the collapse of each *jardin créole*, it is clear that each one ends in a ‘fall’, that arguably signals a sense of longing and even nostalgia on the part of the authors, Chamoiseau and Confiant. In this sense, the *jardin créole* is constructed as an Originary place that exists outside Antillean colonial time and history. For example, the villagers are not aware that there is a war and Rigobert’s days pass in an indefinable blur, ‘ce bonheur dura une quantité de jours’ (*NA*, p. 280). A sense of nostalgia also comes across in Chamoiseau’s *Texaco* in Esternome’s interpretation of the idyll of ‘Noutéka’, brought to an end as the *nègres* gradually abandon the hills for an urban lifestyle, drawn towards the new avatars of the plantation and colonialism (‘les nouvelles reines du pays’ [p. 157]), the sugar factories. When Esternome recounts this story to his daughter Marie-Sophie, it is told with such nostalgia that Marie-Sophie is inspired to recreate her own ‘Noutéka’, in the gradual development of *Texaco* where ‘nous nous comportons comme dans cette vie de ‘Noutéka’ des mornes’ (*T*, p. 348).

These recurrent ‘falls’ imply that the fictional portrayal of the *jardin créole* in the work of Confiant and Chamoiseau is a symbol of the eternal quest for the mythical ‘traces’ of Antillean origins and a nostalgia for an innocent and happy time that pre-dates or excludes the coloniser. Each garden represents a regressive fantasy where the characters can remain firmly in the Antillean topographical and natural world, but ‘step out’ from time and history. It implies the authors’ desire for escape and to construct an alternative place for Antilleans, one that enables them to return – albeit briefly – to a paradise lost. Such a representation is a sort of reaching back to connect with a mythical time of pre-lapserian innocence, a reflex which would simply elide the whole episode of slavery. For this reason, I would argue that the creolist authors’ fictional depictions of the *jardin créole* can be read as regressive refusals of the traumatic truth of slavery and the middle passage and also as a longing for a purity of origins uncontaminated by the colonisers. It is therefore a fantasy that is impossible as it denies a large part of the Antillean past and cannot be seen as a means of dealing with this past because, of course, the Antilles were populated by Africans *by* slavery. In other words, the fictional *jardins créoles* represent a nostalgia for origins that the creolist authors cannot fully identify or that, as stated in the Introduction, can never be known. The next – and final – part of this chapter will focus on the question of origins by examining the apparent elision or even denial of a part of history implied by fictional depictions of the *jardin créole*.

Rites of Passage

The creolist authors' portrayal of the garden's connection with the past as a privileged one and one that offers a set of 'alternative' origins reinforces the notion of the *jardin créole* as an ante-plantation. The paradisiacal aspect of the garden implicates it in a mythical age that excludes the violent presence of the coloniser and connects the characters to a place that seems like an ante-plantation. The close associations between the *jardin créole* and the importance of origins are clearly present in its construction as a lost Eden. This link back to origins is highlighted by Benoît who looks at the various ways in which Guadeloupeans respond to their immediate landscape and the different beliefs that inform this attitude. Benoît argues that, for the slaves:

L'appropriation des jardins de case renvoie à des représentations de la personne et à des cosmogonies bien établies, donc de fait à une symbolisation pour tout individu de son être au monde. (Benoît, p. 260)

This quotation implies that the cultivation of the garden and of specific plants by Guadeloupeans is a way for them to connect to the different elements that form their identity. This process thus links the people back to their ancestors through the land. The notion of the gardens as a regressive fantasy back to an imaginary innocence and purity is strengthened by the presence of the 'ancestors' in the garden.

The narrative episodes of the *jardin créole* in *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* and *Chronique* are each preceded by a rite of passage for the male character that takes

place away from their familiar urban setting out in the hidden isolation of Martinican nature up in the *mornes*. It is here that both Rigobert and Pipi undergo a period of healing and restoration that is overseen by an ancestral figure. Such a similarity is too significant to overlook and implies that this healing process is in some way a necessary rite of passage that has to be completed before entry into, and cultivation of, the *jardin créole* can occur. Victor Turner,¹²² in his study of the Ndembu tribes identifies the different steps involved in rites but draws attention in particular to the symbolic importance of these rituals within which ‘every song or prayer, every unit of space and time, by convention stands for something other than itself’ (Turner, p. 15). For the purposes of our own study, this is important as we examine the symbolic nature of the rite *within* portrayal of those rites in literature. What is interesting is that in the fictional works of the creolist authors, the pattern for these ‘rites of passage’ is very similar. This link to African tribal behaviour implies that the creolist authors are using their writing to mark out Antillean traditions as different from those of European origin and, above all, to identify the link between Africa and the Antilles.¹²³ Turner’s anthropological study explains in great detail the different formats of this tribe’s rites of passage, identifying the significance of specific objects such as medicines

¹²² Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process – Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1996).

¹²³ The creolist authors praise Césaire for bringing *Négritude* to the Antilles, ‘En lui restaurant sa dimension africaine, elle [la Négritude césairienne] a mis fin à l’amputation qui générât un peu de la superficialité de l’écriture par elle baptisée doudouiste’ (EC, p. 17). While the opening lines of the same text state categorically that they are not African, the authors nevertheless see this ‘restoration’ of their African element as important, making their distance from Europe clear. However, as Confiant states in *Une traversée paradoxale (Aimé Césaire: une traversée paradoxale du siècle)* (Paris: Stock, 1993), *Négritude* ‘a pitieusement échoué sur le plan culturel et politique en ne prenant pas en charge la langue et la culture créoles quotidiennes’ (p. 121). In other words, Césaire did not go far enough – in Confiant’s opinion – in asserting the Creole component of his people.

collected from different trees (Turner, p. 23); an animal (*Ibid.*, p. 32), cold water (*Ibid.*, p. 35). Eliade, on the other hand, explores the function of rites in more general terms, and argues that what takes place in these rites is the repetition of what the ancestors did and each re-enactment of these movements is a means of connecting back to them. In other words, tapping into a mythical past was a means of returning to a cosmogonic time, however briefly:

Every [rite] construction is an absolute beginning; that is, tends to restore the initial instant, *the plenitude of a present that contains no trace of history*.¹²⁴

This quotation stresses the principal role of the rite of passage as a means of returning to origins and also of stepping out of chronological time. This encapsulates the desire to escape from present circumstances, creating an imaginary past and 'primordial paradise'. So, in their fictional representation of the *jardin créole*, Chamoiseau and Confiant find a means of sidestepping the painful past of colonialism. The characters in the garden enjoy a (brief) period of harmony and fulfilment far from the troubles of the present. Initially at least, the happiness of the male characters, and the idyllic nature of their new life away from any colonial structure, implies that their time in the garden represents a new beginning. This impression is reinforced by the process of purification undergone by each character before his arrival in the garden. The first step in the creolist

¹²⁴ *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (trans. from French by William R. Trask) (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1954), p. 76 (my emphasis)

authors' rite of passage is a form of cleansing that takes place through the medicinal use of plants, the first part of the process as identified by Turner above.

In *Chronique*, when Pipi is rescued by Marguerite Jupiter and taken into her home, he is almost dead having spent some time alone in a 'cursed glade' of the forest. Marguerite brings a Papa-feuilles to heal Pipi by treating him 'comme une plante' (CSM, p. 182) and by feeding him with various herbal concoctions: 'des tisanes d'herbes rouges, des bouillons de végétaux gras, des soupes aux parfums de savanes, des tiges de bois-vert à mâcher' (CSM, p. 182). It is only after this specific healing in and by the natural environment that Pipi eventually has the strength – and indeed the knowledge – to begin to cultivate the land for himself. This episode implies that in order to be 'initiated' into the land a form of cleansing must occur. We have examined the significance of Papa-feuille's restoration of Pipi *before* his creation of the *jardin créole*. In other words, the time he spent alone with this shaman figure appears to be a form of initiation that gives Pipi the strength to cultivate his garden as well as an awareness of the significance of the local plants and vegetation. When Pipi eventually turns to his own garden, he is given plants by a community of 'Rastas' whom he comes across by accident, hidden in the heart of the woods and this too seems important, for this community are completely removed from the metropolitan French aspect of the Antilles. It is they who teach him what to do with certain plants, and how to grow them in his garden. He returns to the Rastas later when he feels that his garden is not yet producing enough and finally learns 'l'ancestrale connivance de l'homme avec la terre' (CSM, p. 195). His skills develop to the extent that he

becomes an 'expert végétal' or 'artiste agricole'. The definition of this grand term is given as 'une maîtrise des arcanes entre les plantes, l'eau, le soleil et la terre' (p. 196). The harmony of nature that emerges from this definition adds a spiritual, almost mystical dimension to the cultivation of plants, reinforcing the notion of the sacredness of nature.

Rigobert is also in a desperate situation when he stumbles into a village, having fled *L'En-ville*. He is welcomed by the villagers and begins to talk 'tant et tellement qu'il déparla' until he 's'abîma dans un untarissable délire' (*NA*, p. 272). He falls into a sort of unconsciousness and sleeps for days. He is then brought back to life in the same way as Pipi by the natural plants of Idoménee who makes him drink every evening 'un breuvage brûlant d'herbes-à-tous-maux adouci avec de la cannelle' (p. 272). What is identifiable here in both novels is the role of the plants which play a key role in the healing process. These specifically Creole plants and herbs (unfamiliar to the urbanised Pipi and Rigobert) are used here in a medicinal sense, implying that for each male character to be cured, he must first be purified by the mysterious powers of Creole nature, undoubtedly a way of unlocking the hidden Creole self.

Benoît has traced the medicinal and symbolic power of the plants and examines, among other aspects, the way in which plants are used for the human body in herbal drinks such as the *thé-pays*. She informs us that Guadeloupeans believe that 'les 'décollages', les tisanes, les loch, protègent le corps dès l'intérieur. Ces breuvages jouent sur les deux registres du nettoyage et de la

fermeture du corps' (Benoît, p. 80). She outlines the traditional medicines for the body, demonstrating how good health is believed to be determined by a balance of fluids, 'hot' and 'cold' (pp. 72-79). Benoît demonstrates how, in contemporary Guadeloupean society, these beliefs and traditions continue to exist. We can surmise then that the representation of these beliefs in the literature of Confiant and Chamoiseau stems from a desire to portray the system of beliefs that exist in the Antilles but more importantly that it is a system that connects them to (non-colonial) ancestors:

On vient de voir à propos de la Guadeloupe qu'une société de la Caraïbe, [...] a pu élaborer des systèmes de représentations du monde originales. Les savoirs liés aux plantes médicinales, l'organisation des jardins de case et les pratiques des guérisseurs ont été les moyens d'accès à ces cosmologies. (Benoît, p. 259)

The reference to the 'original world' recalls our earlier links between the fictional depictions of the *jardin créole* and the biblical Garden of Eden. In the textual examples analysed above, the plants are clearly part of a rite of passage and a means to self-restoration. Eliade also refers to the symbolic importance of specific herbs and argues that their value stems from their medicinal properties but also comes from the beliefs constructed around a specific plant:

No plant is precious in itself, but only through its participation in an archetype, or through the repetition of certain gestures and words which,

by isolating it from profane space, consecrate it. (*The Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 30)

In other words, the plants themselves are only assigned this specific power because of their inclusion in the ritual process.

We will now examine the creolist authors' depiction of the restorative nature of plants as a necessary part of the construction of a *jardin créole* before linking this restorative process to the ancestor figure. It is the mysterious 'ancestor' in each case who manages the transition. Yet, the ancestor not only acts as a direct agent of the rite of passage into nature for Pipi and Rigobert, the *jardin créole* itself only exists and flourishes because of the presence of the ancestor.

The restoration of a weakened man by a figure connected to pre-colonial origins and who knows how to use the natural resources of the land is a recurring theme. In each case the restoration seems to represent a rite of passage in the transformation from the child to the man. This restoration process is made clear in *Biblique* where Balthazar undergoes a similar experience in his initiation into his life as a future *guerrier*. Pursued from birth by the supernatural figure of Yvonne Cléoste, Balthazar is finally taken by his desperate mother up into the heart of the forest to be brought up by Man L'Oubliée, in a bid to save him. As the following extract reveals, plants are again used both to protect him and to give him the strength to fight his own battle. At this point, Balthazar has been given increasing independence by Man L'Oubliée and wanders away from the area

designated as safe by her. Balthazar eats an unidentifiable object that threatens to kill him and is immediately rescued:

Man L'Oubliée le soigna avec quelques bains de feuillages, trois tisanes à trois goûts, sept breuvages à sept goûts qu'elle lui fit avaler au fil sombre de la nuit. Par les vomis, les sueurs, les pisses et le reste il dut se vider de tout ce qu'il y avait d'ancien en lui [...] Il fut délavé en son âme et dans son corps. Il demeura deux ou trois jours flapi, et retrouva une autre vigueur. D'autres muscles. Un autre port de tête. (BDG, 273)

The *bains* and *tisanes* evoke the Creole traditions of the use of plants for medicinal purposes mentioned previously, and here their efficacy is clearly indicated, as is their mythical power. The strength of the plants is implied in the powerful effect they have on Balthazar's body and mind. It is significant that they force him to completely empty himself of all that is *ancien*. The enormous catharsis of Balthazar's body is thus a cleansing process and he is now ready to be initiated into the natural world. There then follow days, months and years of *apprentissage* whereby he observes Man L'Oubliée intently, absorbing everything he can about plants, realising that 'le moindre de ses savoirs était tout à la fois une arme et une sauvegarde' (p. 275).

This episode involves a ritual cleansing that leads to the near-death of Balthazar's 'old' self and a form of 'rebirth' of his new self. The regeneration that occurs here can thus be read as a second birth for Balthazar. Indeed Eliade, in his analysis of rites argues that 'Initiation is equivalent to a second birth' (*Myths*,

Dreams and Mysteries p. 79). The ‘womb’ in this case is the novice ‘entering a sacred spot identified with the uterus of Mother Earth’ (*Ibid.*, p. 79). I will return to implications of the initiation into nature as a form of rebirth but firstly will examine more closely the role of the ancestor throughout the process of initiation – or rebirth – in all of the fictional examples outlined in this chapter. If the end ‘result’ of these rites of passage can be seen as a rebirth then there is also a sense of a new beginning, an alternative set of origins. For it has become clear that for Rigobert, Pipi and Balthazar, initiation into a deeper understanding of the workings of plants and nature is always a magical process that is administered by an initiator who presides over an existential alteration of the character. This initiator is always, significantly, an ancestral figure, a common feature in the re-enacting of cosmogonic myths according to Eliade,

[A]mong primitives, not only do rituals have their mythical model but any human act whatever acquires effectiveness to the extent to which it exactly *repeats* an act performed at the beginning of time by a god, a hero or an ancestor. (*The Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 22)

The creolist authors imply that an initiation into nature is necessary because it is a way of connecting their characters to the pre-colonial ancestors and thus sidestepping the colonial era. So, in their fictional representations of the *jardin créole*, Chamoiseau and Confiant find a means of sidestepping the painful past of colonialism.

The gardens in *Chronique* and *Le Nègre* suggest a desire by the creolist authors to imagine a new beginning. This process for both characters is constructed as a kind of 'return' to the earth and natural elements. Benítez-Rojo advocates the 'rhythm' of nature and of the earth as a means for the Caribbean people to connect to their ancient ancestors, the ones who preceded the arrival of the colonisers. He argues that this process will enable the Caribbean people to deflect the violence that surrounds them and to be able to channel their artistic creations. The idea that nature can provide a means of overcoming the violence of the past is an appealing one, enabling the Caribbean people to access their past through the natural rhythms of the earth and thus get in touch with a past that existed before the arrival of the colonisers.

The rite of passage and the link to the ancestors is a means of creating a cosmogonic myth, offering an alternative (non-colonial) version of their beginnings and suggesting that it is possible to connect back to this time. The ongoing unease with their origins and the need to uncover them is hinted at in the words of Papa-feuilles in *Chronique*. When Papi asks him how he himself 'learned' these skills, Papa-feuilles responds mysteriously:

Comment, Monsieur Papi, comment peut-on savior d'où viennent les choses? L'herbe monte des racines, mais d'où viennent les racines? Les racines sortent de la graine? Mais la question est: d'où vient la graine, et la graine de la graine? (CSM, p. 185)

This quotation brings the whole question of origins and – more importantly – what those origins are – to the forefront.

In *Le Nègre et l'Amiral*, when Rigobert leaves the town he is looking for the *centenaire* (the hundred-year old woman who can help him) and after his recovery in the village, Celle is brought to him to explain what happened to this *centenaire*. It becomes clear that this woman had taught Celle everything she knows, 'elle m'a tout révélé' (p. 277), but had chosen to leave the area due to the arrival of *les maisonnée étrangères*. The communal respect towards this *centenaire* was demonstrated in the wake held for her, 'trois nuits de suite grace aux plus prestigieux conteurs et maîtres de paroles descendus des mornes des alentours' (p. 277). This accolade to a female ancestor is an indicator of the widely-held respect for her. The emphasis on the relationship between this unnamed *centenaire*, Celle and the garden is significant for it implies that she possessed mysterious powers and that these have also been transmitted to Celle. Celle's appearance is described in some detail by Rigobert but his over-riding impression is one of 'Une véritable négresse! Une négresse d'Afrique, aux fesses larges et matées, d'une taille très supérieure aux sang-mêlé' (*NA*, p. 276). Upon seeing her and 'la noirceur fine' (p. 276) of the contours of her body, Rigobert, 'pour qui laideur et noirceur avaient toujours été même bête même poil' (p. 276) is aware for the first time of the beauty of blackness. This eulogy to blackness could be read as a form of Negritude, emphasising the African roots, but what is striking here is the notion of purity. Her large buttocks are described as 'superior' to other Antilleans, those who are contaminated by the blood of the Europeans.

And so, this description suggests, she has a more immediate and valid connection with the earth. Her knowledge of the plants in her *jardin créole* comes from an ancient ancestor of a mysterious, unnamed nature. This extract in *Le Nègre* implies that Confiant, through the figure of his *picaresque hero*, is making a statement about the importance of African ancestors. Although his criticism of Césaire, as mentioned above, makes it clear that he does not see African roots as the only ones that have formed Creoles, his fictional writings imply that he is nevertheless drawn to a notion of purity found in the first African ancestors. This notion of purity is highlighted here because of the association between Celle and the natural Creole environment, unsullied by the colonial system.

The Ancestors

African ancestors of the sort described above appear regularly within Confiant's fiction (eg. Pa Victor in *Le Meurtre du Samedi-Gloria* (see below); the magic garden of Malaba in *L'Allée des soupirs* (pp. 230-232); the regular references to 'nèg-congo' cf. Homère in *Morne-Pichevin*). Each time, the emphasis is upon the connection to 'pure' roots and to a past that is virtually untainted by European colonisers. The following quotation from *Le Meurtre du Samedi-Gloria* gives us an indication of Confiant's view on the African ancestor. It describes the detective's opinion of Pa Victor another 'ancêtre' who, like Papa-feuilles and Man L'Oubliee initiates the rite of passage into the power of nature:

'Cet héritage de l'Afrique était en voie d'extinction et ne subsistait plus guère que dans les simulacres d'affrontement des ballets folkloriques. Ce

nègre-là, se disait le policier, doit être fait d'une autre texture que nous, il doit posséder une sagesse hors de portée du commune des mortels. Un homme-racine. Un homme-courbaril. En communication avec la terre et les nuages, les oiseaux et les rivières. Un ancêtre, quoi! (SG, p .230)

This is the image of *l'ancêtre* that is echoed throughout Confiant's works: a mysterious, indefinable figure who has spiritual connections to other worlds. Eliade describes the 'ancestor' as a 'fusion of the individual into an archetypal category' (Eliade (1954), p. 46). In other words, they lose their meaning as an individual and instead represent a collective past. This seems to describe accurately the way in which the African ancestor is viewed in Confiant's works. It explains the mysterious nature of, for example, Celle, who seems almost un-human in some ways. For example, she tells Rigobert that she will welcome him into her home but that 'Je ne suis pas femme à aimer ni à me laisser aimer. J'ignore ce sentiment-là qui bouleverse à jamais tant et tant d'êtres humains et les transforme en âmes en peine' (NA, p. 277). In these words, Celle separates herself from the rest of the human race, implying that she does not experience life and emotions in the same way as others. In this sense, she is dead and devoid of individuality. Moreover, the ancestor often has a close connection to nature, as is seen in the above quotation with the description of Pa Victor as 'homme-racine, l'homme courbaril'. This creates the impression that the 'ancestor' has a connection to nature that other Antilleans do not – as if the Antillean relationship to nature has been contaminated by the influence of the colonisers. Technology has interfered with the rhythm of nature and there has been a continual movement

away from Creole, 'la domination furtive' seemingly inescapable. These images imply a desire for purity, a desire that seems quite ironic given Confiant's position on the multiplicity of *créolité*.

It is not only the African ancestor who seems to display this purity, but also the Amerindian one, as the creolist authors make clear in *Lettres créoles*. In this joint project, the creolist authors trace the literary history of the Antilles and Haïti and make a point of beginning the text with reference to their Amerindian ancestors, whose 'stories' are inscribed on the *roches écrites* of the islands. It is significant that Confiant and Chamoiseau begin *Lettres créoles* with reference to the stories that have remained buried for so many centuries in the natural landscape and which are only accessible to a chosen few (i.e. the authors who act as go-betweens, able to mediate between this indecipherable past and the present. This attitude indicates a certain arrogance, self-affirmation of the importance of the writer figure). The authors thus interweave memory and nature and create the image of the landscape as what Gosson calls a 'repository for a misrepresented past' (p. 219). The land can almost be seen as a sponge that soaks up the violence and pain that takes place upon it (as seen with the *cachots* in the previous chapter).

In *Ecrire en pays dominé*, Chamoiseau delves deeper into these origins and describes how their different elements inhabit him. Our attention is drawn to both the Amerindian and the African ancestors, both of whom Chamoiseau considers to have been silenced by the colonisers. As there is little written evidence left for

Chamoiseau to connect to these silent ancestors, he turns to his imagination. In this essay the 'voices' of the Amerindian ancestors seem to be woven into the landscape in the same way as the voices of the African slaves:

J'épreuve autour de moi les vie amérindiennes. Elles habitent les sables blancs, les sables noirs, les plages, les anses intouchées: Guapoïdes, Arawaks, Caliviny, Cayo, Suazey, Galibis... Je les mêle à ces bleus d'air et d'eau, aux moutonnenements d'écumes et de nuages. Leur présence-absence m'éloigne d'une vision paradisiaque des plages et cocotiers. (*EPD*, p. 114)

What is significant here is that the traces of the Amerindian ancestors, for Chamoiseau, are to be found in the untouched areas of Martinique. Both ancestral traces are thus interwoven, implying that the Amerindian and original African ancestors are one. This blurring could be explained by chronology: the Amerindians existed on the islands until approximately forty years after the invasion of the first colonisers.¹²⁵ Therefore, both Amerindians and Africans would have inhabited the islands at the same time and, alongside a minority group of Europeans, formed the beginnings of Creole society. In his Amerindian voice/guise, Chamoiseau imagines how the African slaves who 'viendront nous cotoyer adopteront nos pratiques maritimes, agricoles, médicinales. C'est pourquoi des techniques et des mots caraïbes ont traversé les siècles' (*EPD*, p. 116). The process of adaptation undertaken by the African slaves was thus aided by the Amerindians. Although Chamoiseau implies that the colonisers, as newcomers themselves, are also reliant on the knowledge of the Amerindians, the

¹²⁵ According to *Lettres créoles*, p. 277.

direct transfer of information for survival takes place between the Amerindian and the African. This connection between the two establishes a relationship between them, a link between the old world and the new.

The Africans and Amerindians are both also connected by the repression that they suffered at the hands of the Europeans. In a sense, the first Africans to arrive on the islands and the Amerindians are 'pure' in the sense that their blood is untouched by that of the colonisers. This perhaps goes some way to explaining the fascination thus held by Chamoiseau; not only do these ancestors provide alternative origins, they were not initially contaminated by the colonisers.

From this angle, the ancestor seems to be an idealised amalgam of the first African and the Amerindian ancestor. The African heritage is thus allied to the pre-colonial nature of the Antilles. Such a definition of the 'ancestor' seems to correspond to Eliade's definition of the ancestor as a collective, archetypal voice and so provides a different, collective voice of history. In this sense, the remains of both Amerindian and the African ancestors can be found in the earth, in nature – as the previous chapter demonstrates. They are united by their genocide at the hands of the colonisers and their pain and suffering has gathered collectively in the land.¹²⁶ Both these sets of origins are presented by the creolist authors as embedded in the land itself. In so doing, they are implying that, like Benítez-Rojo's vision of nature as something 'transhistorical', ('the cultural discourse of the Peoples of the Sea attempts, through real or symbolic sacrifice, to neutralize

¹²⁶ Chamoiseau reinforces this point in his novel *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse*, 'Les Amérindiens des premiers temps se sont transformés en lianes de douleurs qui étranglent les arbres et ruissellent sur les falaises tel le sang inapaisé de leur propre génocide' (p. 21).

violence and to refer society to the transhistorical codes of Nature' (Benítez-Rojo, p. 17) that this other set of origins preceded the colonisers and that it continues to exist, albeit buried in the land, despite the centuries of violence. This gives a permanency to nature, and a stability that may not be found in the *jardin créole* specifically but that underplays the role of the colonisers in Antillean history nevertheless. It can therefore be said that on a certain level, the *jardin créole* enables the creolist authors to get beyond violence. As demonstrated above, this is done in the creolist authors' novels through the relationship with the ancestor.

The fictional depictions of the *jardin créole* can thus be seen to represent – at least partly – the fantasy of a return to paradise that somehow denies slavery ever happened and is thus depicted as a differentiated space so that Confiant and Chamoiseau could be said to portray twin or possibly joint (impossible) fantasies of origins, one in Africa, one in the Antilles. There is a projection of an Africa transplanted into the Antilles (like the slaves) but without the misery. A form of rebirth takes place which can be understood through Eliade:

Differing in their formulas, all these instruments of regeneration tend towards the same end: to annul past time, to abolish history by a continuous return *in illo tempore*, by the repetition of the cosmogonic act.

(*The Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 81)

It is for this reason that regeneration occurs through the rebirth of the male character.

The construction of the *jardin créole* as a fictional Garden of Eden suggests that the creolist authors are deliberately using their writing to establish some form of mythical account of Antillean beginnings. Although Antillean society cannot be described as ‘archaic’, the fictional representations of the *jardin créole* explored above imply that the creolist authors are using their writing to draw attention to a way of life that is strongly connected to pre-colonial ideas and customs and so can be seen as an attempt to return to the ‘archaic’ form of Antillean society.

We get the impression that for archaic societies, life cannot be *repaired*, it can only be *re-created* by a return to sources. And the ‘source of sources’ is the prodigious outpouring of energy, life and fecundity that occurred at the Creation of the world’. (Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, p. 30)

In other words, although the violence of the past cannot be repaired, momentary rebirth – and therefore escape from this continual violence – is possible by a return to origins. The problem for the creolist authors is of course that these origins remain unknown, however desperate they may be to trace them. While the creolist authors represent the cultivation of the *jardin créole* as a possible means of connecting back to the ‘source’ of their non-colonial ancestors, the destruction of these same gardens indicates that such a connection cannot be long-lasting. The fact that the past cannot simply be ‘repaired’ through a form of regeneration implies that escape from that same past is not a viable option; this process does not actually bring the authors closer to coming to terms with their difficult,

violent past. In the next chapter, we will examine whether an alternative source of 'fecundity' can be found, one that offers a more hopeful means of overcoming the violence of Antillean history.

Chapter 4 – Confronting Violence: the Sea and the Mother Figure

In the Caribbean, there is a literary tradition of the sea, particularly in poetry. For poets and writers such as Saint-John Perse, Aimé Césaire and Derek Walcott, reference to the sea emphasises the natural environment of the Antilles, and thus draws attention to the smallness and vulnerability of the islands amidst the vast expanse of water. More recent writers such as Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau also refer to the sea in their works in a more conciliatory fashion,¹²⁷ emphasising its possible healing aspects. However, above all, the historical role of the sea in the Caribbean, and its implication in colonialism through the slave trade, are central to its place in the Antillean imaginary.

Black Antillean authors traditionally make this link and depict the sea as a violent space, enraged by its enforced complicity in the middle passage. For example, in his renowned poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Aimé Césaire makes several references to the historical role of the sea, drawing attention to its violent rage in Stanza 31: 'la plage ne suffit pas à la rage écumante de la mer'; 'la mer la frappe à grands coups de boxe ou plutôt la mer est un gros chien qui lèche et mord la plage aux jarrets'.¹²⁸ The fury of the sea is undoubtedly linked to its role in the middle passage, the site of the 'original violence' of the Antilles

¹²⁷ In Maryse Condé's novel *Desirada* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1997) the protagonist (daughter of the failed suicide) travels to the island of la Désirade where there are some positive descriptions of the sea; (eg. p. 177); she is also healed by swimming every day when she is a child (p. 29). Gisèle Pineau in her children's book *Un papillon dans la cité* (Paris: Sépia, 1992) describes the central character's experience swimming in the Caribbean on a school trip to Guadeloupe. The sea here is described in terms of freedom from the oppressive environment of the *cité* for metropolitan school children (p. 121).

¹²⁸ Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, ed. Abiola Irele (Ibadan: New Horn Press Ltd, 1994), p. 7.

examined in Chapter 1. Edouard Glissant is more explicit in the link he makes between the sea and the terrors of the past, seeing the ‘abîme’ of the water as a memory that continues to haunt Antilleans. Despite the implication of the sea in the slave trade, Glissant’s admiration for the sea is clear in this text:

“Je te salue, vieil Océan!” Tu preserves sur tes crêtes le sourd bateau de nos naissances, tes abîmes sont notre inconscient même, labourés de fugitives mémoires. Puis tu dessines ces nouveaux ravages, nous y crochons nos plaies striées de goudron, nos bouches rougies et nos clameurs tuées. (Glissant, *Poétique de la relation*, p. 19)

This quotation suggests that the wounds of Antilleans are engraved in the sea, which is represented here as a space that can memorialise their ancestors’ pain, a sort of graveyard for the past. The historical role of the sea is thus of paramount importance for Glissant. The literary tradition in Martinique connects the (Atlantic) Ocean to the past and, above all, it represents the sea as a space that has not denied or forgotten the past and instead bears (painful) witness to it.

By contrast, the sea is not a frequent reference in the works of Chamoiseau and Confiant.¹²⁹ Where it does occur, it seems to be linked – as might be expected – to violence and to origins. Indeed, this chapter will demonstrate that, in their recent works, the sea is highly symbolic for the creolist authors as a place of real and imagined origins. The link back to origins is made by Benítez-Rojo, who suggests that those living in the archipelago are the

¹²⁹ This point is made by Gallagher who states that ‘the *créoliste* imagination does not privilege the sea as a space of displacement’ (Gallagher, *Soundings in French Caribbean writing*, p. 140).

‘Peoples of the Sea’ and ‘everything seems to indicate that they will continue to be so for some time’ (Benítez-Rojo, p. 17). For Benítez-Rojo, the sea as a fluid, fluctuating movement acts as a powerful metaphor for the Caribbean in several ways. Firstly, it connects the islands of the archipelago to one another in fluid, moving ways and, secondly, it connects the Caribbean people to the multiple cultures of the past. Benítez-Rojo’s use of the sea is the ideal starting point of this chapter: although Benítez-Rojo believes the People of the Caribbean to belong to the sea, the Atlantic Ocean in particular is described as ‘suppurating, always suppurating’ (Benítez-Rojo, p. 5). The image of the ongoing pain of colonialism corresponds to Mary Gallagher’s assertion that the ‘scars’ of colonialism continue to linger.¹³⁰ It would appear that the sea is the identified locus – in literal and metaphorical terms – of the original violence of colonialism. This notion of the sea as the birthplace of Antilleans is reinforced by the obvious word association of ‘mer’ and ‘mère’, a point to which we return in the final section of this chapter.

Moreover, the word ‘suppurating’ implies that not only scars but also open wounds remain, festering and filled with the poisonous horrors of colonialism. For Benítez-Rojo, then, the sea seems to be suffering as a direct result of its role played in colonialism. It seems that the ‘painfully delivered child’ of the Caribbean is still struggling to help the wounds heal. This description positions the sea as a site that was central to the violence of the past, and as such makes it a necessary space for Antilleans to explore.

¹³⁰ For the full quotation, see Chapter 1, p. 68.

This chapter will examine whether the sea is represented in the work of the creolist authors as a space in which they can come to terms with the violence of their past, without the denial of it that is evident in their depictions of the *jardin créole*. The analysis of this chapter will focus on the way in which the sea is represented in two novels by Confiant: *Eau de Café* and *Brin d'Amour*; and one by Chamoiseau: *Biblique des derniers gestes*. In *Eau de Café*, the narrator returns to the village where he grew up with his 'marraine', Eau de Café, and her fantastical adopted 'daughter', Antilia. There he attempts to uncover the mystery of both her appearance from and her disappearance into the sea. In *Brin d'Amour*, the female protagonist, Lysiane, like Antilia, has an intense relationship with the sea, a space that is feared and shunned by the rest of the village, who also turn against her. In *Biblique des derniers gestes*, when the protagonist, Balthazar Bodule-Jules, leaves his forest and village following the disappearance of his beloved Sarah Anaïs-Alicia, the first place he comes to is a tiny fishing community. He is able to live there in relative peace until the arrival of a sea monster threatens to destroy the community's livelihood. He joins forces with a woman, Kalamatia, to fight the creature and is drawn into a highly sexualised combat with her on the high seas.

The sea is depicted by both Confiant and Chamsoiseau as marked by the past. This sense is intensified with both authors' recurrent descriptions of the rage of the sea. For example, in *Eau de Café*, the narrator describes how the ocean 'gave birth' to the central character, Antilia, focusing on the ferocity of the sea:

La mer s'était comme rétractée sur sa propre masse, léchant la noirceur du sable avec une rage qu'on devinait difficile à contenir (*EdC*, p. 16)

The sea is depicted as a beast ready to pounce and which is impossible to restrain, a sense heightened in the word 'léchant'. This image also recalls Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* in the quotation on the second page of this chapter, in which the sea is portrayed as a dog biting the sand. This intertextual reference suggests that Confiant is very consciously and deliberately aligning himself with Césaire and that, despite his strong criticisms of the Negritude movement in *Traversée paradoxale*,¹³¹ wishes to position himself clearly as a literary 'son' of Césaire.

In *Brin d'Amour* the fury of the sea is described as the 'déchaînement de l'Atlantique' (*BA*, p. 14). The original violence is evoked in the 'déchaînement' of the sea, which contains the word 'chaîne' despite the fact it has the opposite meaning. It is significant that it is the Atlantic Ocean to which Confiant refers, for this is not the calm, turquoise sea loved by the tourist industry but is instead a violent sea with ferocious waves. Continued reference to the 'rage' of the sea is made in *Eau de Café* and *Brin d'amour* – 'la mer rageuse' (*EdC*, p. 38) adapts 'un masque haineux' (*EdC*, p. 13), while its waves are 'enragés' (*EdC*, p. 14), and in *Brin d'Amour* the rage seems never-ending in the description of 'l'infinie colère de la mer de Grand-Anse' (*BA*, p. 152). This is a fury that is filled with hatred and that is felt in each wave that beats upon the beach. Furthermore, the rage is rarely appeased, suggesting that it is constantly being renewed. However,

¹³¹ See the quotation from *Traversée paradoxale* cited in footnote 123 in Chapter 3, p. 182.

this feeling of anger is not the only emotion accorded to the sea. The narrator also evokes the ‘resentment’ of the Atlantic Ocean, ‘Mer de janvier jaune d’une rancune jamais apaisée’ (*EdC*, p. 53). This ‘rancour’ reinforces the associations between the sea and the middle passage, and also recalls Benítez-Rojo’s description of the Atlantic as a wound that never healed but that is ‘suppurating, always suppurating’.

The violent memories of colonialism seem to live on in the sea where, unlike the *jardin créole*, the past cannot be denied. Confiant’s representation of the unassuaged anger of the sea contrasts with his continual depiction of a general Antillean inability to remember the past. The violence of the sea is portrayed by him as a self-righteous, justified one because it is a response to the brutality of the slave trade.¹³² However, as is the case in *Nuée ardente*, the collective group of *nègres* fail to understand the significance of this rage and instead are taught by the community to loathe the sea, holding it responsible for the horrors of the past, ‘cette mer qu’on nous enseignait à haïr dès que nous avions cessé de téter le sein maternel’ (*EdC*, p. 30).¹³³ Yet it is not only anger that is felt by the villagers, but also an overwhelming sense of sadness. Confiant makes this point in *Brin d’Amour* when the detective is told by Bogino, ‘Personne ne traîne sur la plage de Grand-Anse. C’est d’une foutue tristesse, oui. La mer peut vous happer en six-quatre-dix’ (p. 142). It is therefore a place that causes fear because of its unpredictable danger as well as the great sadness that stems from it. The

¹³² This corresponds to the analyses of *Biblique* in Chapter 1 where the anonymous woman loved by Balthazar becomes a motif for his transformation into a *guerrier*.

¹³³ The significance of the maternal image will become clear below.

‘tristesse’ is undoubtedly linked to the slave trade, as we know that many slaves drowned (or were thrown overboard) in their journey across the Atlantic. The Atlantic is thus a graveyard, as the character of the *guerrier* states in *Ecrire* ‘Des millions de crânes couvrent les fonds de la mer caraïbe dans l’attente d’un signe qui ne viendra jamais...(*il soupire*)...Ce qui est nègre est volontiers laissé aux portes des commémorations humanistes. Tout cela crée dans la conscience humaine une ombre dont les frontières mouvantes ont des envies de bonds’ (*EPD*, p. 76). This quotation reveals how the ‘traces’ of these corpses remain imprinted in the minds of present-day Antilleans. It is also a representation of the sea that echoes how Glissant and other Caribbean authors have used the motif in their work. The depictions of the sea examined above, where it is a place of rage, violence and sadness because of its connection to the slave trade, suggest the authors represent the sea in a similar way to their literary forefathers.

However, for both authors, and for Chamoiseau in particular, the sea is also portrayed as an ambivalent, liminal space, a notion that is also reinforced in their depictions of the beach. The ambivalence of the beach is alluded to by Marie-Sophie in Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*:

Au bord des rivières, le sable de volcan est déjà du bon sable. Mais sable du bord de mer est alourdi de sel et travaillé de fer. Cahier No.4 de Marie-Sophie Laborieux. (*T*, p. 51)

Here, the positive image of the black, volcanic sand near fresh water as ‘bon sable’ implies that the river and the volcano have a purifying effect, a similar

image of the volcano to the one constructed by Confiant in *Nuée ardente* examined in Chapter 1. However, the sea water has more negative associations: the word ‘fer’ evokes the chains that bound the slaves on the journey across the sea where arrival on the sand marked the terrible ‘beginning’ of their new life. The Antillean relationship with the beach is therefore fraught with tension – while it represented the arrival on land, relief at the end of the journey, it was also the beginning of life as a slave. In this quotation, Chamoiseau suggests that the beach is somehow ‘contaminated’ by the experience of slavery, an image that corresponds with the representations of his literary forefathers.

So, while Chamoiseau does depict the sea as complicitous with the past in *Biblique*, it also represents a possible openness towards a new world. For the fishing community:

La mer c'était leur vie. Leur jardin [...] Ils tournaient le dos à la terre noire du sol qui respirait encore les miasmes d'esclavage. Ils ne voulaient voir au coco de leurs yeux que la terre bleue des mers, son aller vers les îles lointaines, sa charge d'autres pays, d'autres ravages et d'autres fraternités. (BDG, p. 633, my emphasis)

In this quotation, the description of the sea as a ‘jardin’ is significant, implying that, for this fishing community, the sea is the source of their livelihood, enabling a level of self-sufficiency that was initially found in the garden but that here is more real. While the *jardin créole* offers the slaves a brief period of independence, the sea is depicted in this example as a more permanent provider. Moreover, the

sea in *Biblique* seems to enable the inhabitants of the village to ‘turn their backs’ on the traces of slavery that remain in the land. The garden is represented as a place of denial of the trauma of colonialism, yet the sea seems to offer a more positive way of dealing with the past. By ‘turning their backs’ on the horrors, the fishing community are not denying they ever happened but are instead looking outwards towards the future. The use of the word ‘respirait’ is effective, reinforcing the earlier notion that the traces of slavery have been absorbed into the land. In contrast, the sea seems free from such chains. This explains why the gaze of the community is instead fixed firmly on ‘la terre bleue’ of the sea, turned ‘vers les îles lointaines’. In *Biblique*, in Balthazar’s sojourn in a tiny fishing village, the collective community do not fear the sea but instead – as is quoted above – they consider it to be their ‘jardin’. Nevertheless, they are used to the ‘irruption des monstres’ (*BDG*, p. 643) from the sea, indeed ‘[c]es aggressions[...] ramen[aient] la peur comme une pluie sur ce sable, comme si la mer voulait mettre à l’épreuve ces bonshommes sombres qui la défiaient’ (*BDG*, p. 643). The monsters’ occasional brutality acts as a reminder to the fishing community that it is at the mercy of the sea, and that the sea should be feared. Yet for all its danger, ‘*La mer n’est jamais si belle que lorsqu’elle a faim*’ (p. 641).

Similarly, for *Confiant*, the sea is represented as a space that can offer a possible means of escape for the islanders, as well as fear. In *Brin d’amour*, the sea features as a powerful force from which the central female character, Lysiane, is inseparable. She tells us how the sea seems to communicate directly with her: ‘l’océan, renouvelé à chacun de mes regards, me rappelle avec insistance que là-

bas, “dehors” comme on dit ici, existent d’autres mondes que la plupart d’entre nous ne connaîtront jamais’ (*BA*, pp. 67-68). This quotation suggests that the sea can offer her comfort. Lysiane’s central position in the novel means that this strength she finds in the sea cannot be overlooked. However, the emphasis on the openness of the sea towards other, new places is less positive than Chamoiseau’s depiction in *Biblique*, because of the note of pessimism that most Antilleans ‘ne connaîtront jamais’ these other lands. Confiant therefore emphasises the enclosing, insular role of the sea. We will return to the difference between the authors in their portrayal of the sea as this chapter progresses.

Part 1: Female Characters as Allegorical

The examples above suggest that the sea is constructed by both Confiant and Chamoiseau as the site where different tensions converge, and a closer examination indicates that the image of the sea in the works of the creolist authors is one of a violent, enraged force that is associated with femininity, as an examination of three key female characters demonstrates: Antilia (*Eau de Café*), Lysiane (*Brin d’Amour*) and Kalamatia (*Biblique*). Each one acts as a mediating force between the sea and the terrified village in the novels. The female characters each stand out because they are the only ones in the community who are not intimidated by the sea, and indeed – in Confiant’s novels – they need to be face-to-face with the sea. For example, in *Eau de Café*, the narrator describes how Antilia would sit on her bed watching the sea ‘perdue dans une méditation abyssale’ (*EdC*, p. 38) until her godmother closes the shutters, ce qui avait pour

effet de ramener aussitôt la jeune femme à son état de servante obéissante et un peu sosotte' (p. 39). This rather derogatory description of Antilia suggests that when the sea is hidden from her, she loses all power and vivacity, becoming completely passive. The sight of the sea is what gives Antilia her identity.

Lysiane's relationship with the sea is less intense than this, but she too needs to see the sea. The narrator expresses this when he sees Lysiane at the front window, as usually she 'préf[érait] celle du fond, laquelle lui permettait d'assister à la naissance du jour au miquelon de la mer' (*BA*, p. 49). Later he adds that the window 'qui faisait face à la mer' (p. 55) was where Lysiane 'se réfugiait' (p. 55). For Lysiane, then, the sight of the sea is what calms her. She too likes to be facing it.

It is interesting to note that in *Ecrire*, Chamoiseau also talks about the effect of looking at the sea which inspires him but which makes it difficult for him to write:

Je n'ai jamais écrit face à la mer, mais je peux y passer des heures en léthargie contemplative; j'ai longtemps perçu cette attitude comme une petite mort, une décrochée sterile, alors que la mer me précipite dans l'existant: là je deviens minéral, végétal liquide ou aérien, d'une patience oubliée des histoires et des necessities. (*EPD*, p. 246)

This implies the sea has a calming effect on Chamoiseau, one that enables him to lose himself, unlike Confiant's female characters, who find themselves in this natural phenomenon. However, Chamoiseau also indicates that it is a space in

which identity can be transcended. It is perhaps for that reason that, in *Biblique*, Kalamatia does actually confront the sea, in a way that neither of Confiant's female characters do. When the monster triumphs and destroys the 'chasseurs', nobody ventures into the sea except Kalamatia. This is all the more remarkable given that the men 'ne permattaient jamais à une femme' (*BDG*, p. 643) to combat the monster. Kalamatia then, like Antilia and Lysiane, is an isolated female who, through her fearless relationship with the sea, challenges the preconceptions and prejudices of the collective community. However, the fact that Kalamatia actually enters into battle on the sea implies that – for Chamoiseau – there is a need for confrontation. Chamoiseau is perhaps more keen to confront the past that the sea represents, than Confiant, who continues to emphasise the mysteriousness of the sea. To explore this line of thought further, I will examine whether the female characters are in fact constructed by the creolist authors as allegorical figures.

Jules Michelet observed in 1875 that '[w]oman is most touched by the sea and the poetry of the Infinite'. This link between femininity and the sea is thus entrenched in the myths of time: a mysterious, inexplicable relationship that binds women to the sea.¹³⁴ Indeed the connection between femininity, myth and the sea dates back to ancient and mythological times. One obvious example is the Greek goddess, Aphrodite. Born from the sea, Aphrodite is strongly associated with love, sex and beauty.¹³⁵ In the Antilles, the mythical connection between the sea

¹³⁴ Jules Michelet, *The Sea* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1875), p. 301.

¹³⁵ Jenny March, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (London: Cassell & Co, 1998), pp. 55-57.

and the Amerindians comes together in the fabled creature of Manman Dlo:¹³⁶ ‘la reine des mers et des rivières’ and ‘Cette sirène mythique des Caraïbes, aussi protectrice qu’impitoyable, aussi belle que dangereuse, rappelle le rôle vital, premier de l’eau’.¹³⁷ This description of Manman Dlo suggests that she is a contradictory figure in the Antilles, representing beauty but also danger.

The names of these female characters are all clearly allegorical. The name Antilia in *Eau de Café* suggests that this female character is an allegorical figure for the Antilles, and this becomes even more obvious in the course of the novel, particularly because of the plural nature of her origins. The implication is that if her roots are mixed then so must be the roots of the Creoles. Like Aphrodite, Antilia emerges from the sea as a beautiful but mysterious, desirable creature. Therefore her name alone has implications for the mythical origins of the Antilles, to which we will return below. In *Brin d’Amour*, the name of the central character, Lysiane Augusta, again seems symbolic and is also associated with classical myth through the Roman warrior Augustus, thus implying that Lysiane is a fighting, conquering force in this novel. In *Biblique*, Kalamatia’s name has several connotations. Gilbert Durand, in his analysis of the archetypal meanings

¹³⁶ One of Chamoiseau’s first publications was a play written for children, entitled *Manman Dlo contre la Fée Carabosse* (Paris: Caribéennes, 1982) in which the evil fairy fights the magical river queen, who teaches the former the power of the water. This play has received little critical attention but has been dismissed by Dash as ‘a naïve exercise in wishful thinking’ for its depiction of Martinique (*The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), p. 139. Nevertheless, it reveals Chamoiseau’s interest in the mythical figure of Manman Dlo and his positive consideration of her.

¹³⁷ <http://www.guadeloupe-fr.com/articleDestinationGuadeloupe/3061>, retrieved 17th August 2004.

of water and femininity gives several definitions of the word 'Kala'.¹³⁸ It can be spelt 'Kala' meaning 'divinité de la mort' and so her name is thus also associated with ancient myths. 'Kâla' also signifies 'temps, destin' and 'tâche souillé au physique comme au moral' (Durand, p. 120). This association between the word 'Kala' and the very character of Kalamatia seems too relevant to be overlooked. Interestingly, Kalamatia's name also contains the word 'kal', Creole for the male sex,¹³⁹ the significance of which becomes clear in the latter part of this chapter. The remainder of this chapter will examine how an analysis of these female characters and their association with the sea leads to an understanding of Chamoiseau and Confiant's vision of the Antilles, in particular their representation of the Antillean past, and future.

In Confiant's novels, *Eau de Café* and *Brin d'Amour*, the reader is rapidly made aware of the village's collective fear of Antilia and Lysiane. In the opening pages of *Eau de Café*, the villagers' hatred towards Antilia is made clear. As she lies dead, the anger of the village erupts. The priest refuses to give her a Christian burial much to the delight of the villagers ('[d]'ailleurs, le bourg entier le lui aurait interdit' [*EdC*, p. 14]). Instead the people flood to where Antilia's corpse lies: '[d]es matrones hystériques' (*EdC*, p. 14), batter on *Eau de Café*'s door, and

¹³⁸ Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire: Introduction à l'archétype générale* (Paris: Dunod, 2002).

¹³⁹ Jean Bernabé provides a definition of the word in 'Recherche sur le créole spécifique. 1. La désignation du corps humain' in *Espace Créole* 2 (1977), 21-38: 'Le terme *kal* (pénis) constitue l'élément central d'un microsystème lexical en expansion [...] Ce mot s'applique aussi à la bouche: *i ka kalé dyèl li* (il retrousse sa bouche, entendons: ses lèvres)' (p. 34). This could imply that Kalamatia represents the allegorical mouthpiece of the collective community; her confrontation of the sea an indication that the Antillean people are ready to face up to the past.

the men, ‘aiguil[ent] leur coutelas au hasard’ (*EdC*, p.14), while an old woman shouts:

‘Allez-vous-en avec votre bête maléfique! Partez loin de Grand-Anse avec la maudition que vous y avez entretenue exprès pour nous apporter du déveine!’ (*EdC*, p. 14)

These words suggest that Antilia is not considered to be human but is instead ‘une bête’. Moreover, she is considered to be cursed, a sense that is reinforced by the presence of the words ‘maléfique’, ‘maudition’ and ‘déveine’. The reason for these accusations lies in Antilia’s mysterious arrival upon the beach (a place considered ‘cursed’ by the villagers), and her unknown origins. Moreover, she seems to have an intimate connection with the sea, a fact that does not go unnoticed by the villagers at the moment of her death:

Dehors, la mer s’était affublée d’un masque haineux, plus haineux qu’à la saison des cyclones, et quand l’on sut dans le bourg qu’Antilia avait trépassé, on devina quelque relation entre les deux phénomènes (*EdC*, p. 13).

In revenge, the villagers pillage Eau de Café’s shop for her sheltering of Antilia. By beginning his novel with such a description of Antilia, Confiant immediately establishes this character as non-human and feared. Moreover, the narrator confirms the villagers’ opinion, telling us that ‘le monde autour de nous n’avait pas tort’ (p. 18) as he recalls Antilia’s reaction to a cyclone from the sea. Ignoring

Eau de Café's pleas for her to close the window, Antilia 'se tenait roide, le regard rivé au lointain' (p. 18). As the cyclone gathers strength, Antilia becomes increasingly excited and her entire body seems to respond to the wind and rain coming in from the sea, 'la sirène ulula, interminable, avec des modulations cahotiques qui étaient sans doute l'oeuvre des vents' (p. 19). Her sudden laughter in the face of the sea's fury causes the house to shake 'comme s'il s'était agi d'un tremblement de terre' (p. 19), creating an impression that she is indeed some mysterious creature. Finally, she jumps out of the window into the sea, leaving the narrator and Eau de Café 'étourdis d'effroi' (p. 20). The connection established here between the mood of Antilia and the sea indicates that they are intimately linked in a terrifying, violent way.

Before exploring these implications further, it is important to note that Lysiane is described in similar terms in *Brin d'Amour*. Like Antilia, the villagers fear Lysiane *because* of her relationship to the sea: 'Lysiane Augusta était donc redoutée par les habitants de Grand-Anse parce qu'elle n'éprouvait aucune crainte de la mer' (BA, p. 56). Moreover, in her 'Calendrier d'une Absence', Lysiane explains the main reason for her attraction to the sea. As a child, a shipwreck occurs just off the beach. While the other villagers are horrified, Lysiane begins to laugh, '[u]n rire féroce, irrépressible. Un rire surgi des profondeurs de mon être' (pp. 35-36). This laughter completely alienates her from the rest of the village who turn on her: 'ils m'accusèrent, final de compte, d'être l'auteur du naufrage qui s'éternisait là [...] Pourtant j'ai continué dans mon rire' (p. 36). The only explanation the villagers find for Lysiane's response is that she is

responsible for the shipwreck, as if she is in some sort of complicit relationship with the sea. This laughter in response to the power and violence of the sea recalls Antilia's laughter in the storm described above. This seemingly uncontrollable reaction is what seems so unnatural to the others, and it is also what terrifies them. Lysiane's incessant laughter in *Brin d'Amour* causes the terrified villagers to flee from the beach shouting '*protégez nous de cette enfant tourmentée par le Malin!*' (p. 36). Again, this quotation recalls the old woman's accusation of Antilia as a curse. Lysiane and Antilia are therefore both represented by Confiant as closely associated with the sea in a sort of intimacy that provokes the suspicions of the other villagers, who are already fearful of the sea. These women's relationship to the sea makes them appear unnatural to the others, almost monstrous, as if they are touched by evil and can only bring danger to the village. The mysterious aspect of Antilia and Lysiane is neither positive nor harmonious, but instead provokes fear.

The image of Antilia and Lysiane as hysterical, laughing 'sorcières' indicates that Confiant is endorsing traditional myths of femininity. This type of representation is critiqued in the opening chapter of *La Jeune née*, in which Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous examine literary representations of the female. Critically appraising the writings of Jules Michelet and Freud on women, she summarises the myth of the woman in the following way:

Ainsi les femmes seraient-elles affublées de compromis irréalisables, de transitions imaginaires, de synthèses incompatibles. Sorcière et hystérique: elles sont bien ainsi. (Cixous & Clément, p. 19)

This role for the female seems to describe accurately Confiant's portrayals of Antilia and Lysiane. The image of woman embodying 'transitions imaginaires' and 'synthèses incompatibles' in the masculine imaginary conveys the contradictions and tensions that both of Confiant's female characters seem to represent. Moreover, his women are constructed as 'sorcière' (Antilia and Lysiane are each referred to as a 'sorcière' by the other villagers) and as 'hystérique' (seen in the uncontrollable laughter that terrifies the others). All of this places the female under the domination of the male, according to Clément, because woman thus becomes a caricature projected by the male and thus a passive product of his active imaginary. So, on one level it would appear that Confiant is also promulgating this traditional representation of the female. However, Confiant's characters are also constructed as sexual temptresses, who remain indifferent to male advances, with the result that they each become dangerous to the equanimity of the male characters.

In Confiant's novels both Antilia and Lysiane are associated with a complicitous violence. In *Eau de Café*, Antilia's mood seems directly related to the sea as examined above. Her beauty also appears to be responsible for the death of the priest in Grand-Anse: as Antilia runs naked through the village, screaming at the villagers, the priest sees her: 'cette belleté s'était muée en un

désir brutal dans le mitan de son ventre' (*EdC*, p. 69) leading to an erection that eventually kills him with a heart attack. Moreover, the reason for Antilia's screams seem even more violent as she shouts in a 'propos intraduisable en langue civilisée où il est question de l'arrivée d'une Madone qui viendrait émasculer les nègres et taillader le vagin des négresses' (p. 68). Her words seem to reinforce the impression that she is dangerous, and somehow emasculating.

The menacing sexuality of Confiant's female characters also gives the collective community in each case further reason to fear them. Both Antilia and Lysiane are beautiful (they are desired by all the men in the village) but are also dangerous. For example, in *Eau de Café* Antilia is described as too desirable as the narrator is warned by the carpenter: 'Prends garde à toi avec cette femelle sans mère et sans nom! Elle peut déposer dans ta chair un désir à te déchirer l'âme en mille petits paquets de douleur' (*EdC*, p. 61) thus implying that she casts some sort of spell on men that leads to inevitable destruction.

Lysiane also has a powerful sexual effect on the men in the village. The narrator refers to the 'concert de louanges que de grappes d'enjôleurs et de baliverneurs venaient déverser à la fenêtre de la jeune fille dès la brune du soir' (*BA*, p. 17). She gets irritated with the advances of her would-be lovers and turns away from them, preferring to sit at the other window 'qui envisageait la mer et voltigeait des crachats en direction des flots tout aussi rageuse que sa personne' (*BA*, p. 18). Her preference for the sea rather than male flattery is seen as odd by the rest of the village thus increasing their suspicion of her.

For Chamoiseau, the menacing violence is portrayed specifically as a lascivious one. In *Biblique*, Kalamatia is constructed as a woman who is sexually violent, as will be examined below. In addition to this form of violence is the wrestling that takes place between Kalamatia and the sea monster, in whom Balthazar recognises ‘la forme d’Yvonne Cléoste’ (*BDG*, p. 650), the witch who has pursued him mercilessly since his childhood. The image of the two women fighting is described in almost salacious terms as Balthazar watches helpless: ‘Il voyait ses tétés [de Kalamatia] formidables battre comme des ailes. Il voyait sa kounia s’ouvrir comme une gueule quand elle sautait jambes écartées pour viser la bête jaillissante’ (p. 650). This representation of Kalamatia’s sexual organs seems to correspond to the image of the *vagina dentata*. The dangerous vagina is described by Neumann, who states that ‘the destructive side of the Feminine, the destructive and deathly womb, appears most frequently in the archetypal form of a mouth bristling with teeth’.¹⁴⁰ Kalamatia’s sex is quite clearly represented here as a menacing symbol, and a highly sexualized one. Indeed, both Kalamatia and the feminine sea monster seem locked in a physical struggle that evokes a sexual one. This form of sexuality has a different impact on Balthazar in *Biblique*, compared to the fear and suspicion felt by Confiant’s male characters towards Antilia and Lysiane. Instead, Balthazar is excluded here. When he tries to join in the fight, he is forced over the side of the boat and left to float ‘à sangloter d’impuissance et de rage’ (*BDG*, p. 651). We will return below to this

¹⁴⁰ Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother – An Analysis of the Archetype* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 168. A detailed psychoanalytical approach is beyond the confines of this study and Neumann is used simply to confirm the structures of the symbolism outlined in this chapter.

overwhelming ‘impotency’ in the face of feminine sexual violence. Here, what is important is that both *Confiant* and *Chamoiseau*, in different ways, represent the female characters as associated with a violence that is threatening to the male characters.

Monstrous, terrifying and sexually dangerous then, *Confiant*’s two female characters seem, above all, to be unnatural. In *Eau de Café*, this impression is reinforced with the doctor’s diagnosis that Antilia ‘n’est point un être de chair et de sang’ (*EdC*, p.14). His judgement acts as an official statement that seems to justify the villagers’ response to her because, in medical terms, she is not human. Instead, Antilia seems to be related to the sea, as is indicated in her mysterious séance with Marie-Eugenie – the disturbed daughter of the *béké* de Cassagnac – who growls at Antilia, ‘Femelle aquatique! [...] Je n’aime pas ton odeur de marée’ (*EdC*, p. 43). The fact that she smells of the ‘tide’ ties in with mythical associations of female biological rhythms and the movement of the tides. At the beginning of *Brin d’Amour*, Lysianne’s relationship to the sea also seems biological:

[Q]u’elle fût ou non en ses périodes, elle écartait largement ses jambes et laissait son sang se dévider de son corps avec une impudeur tranquille qui effrayait la maisonnée. De tout temps, nous avons su qu’elle perdait du sang. (*BA*, p. 14)

The narrator recounts how Lysiane loses this much blood ‘sans en éprouver la plus infime souffrance’ (p. 14). This excessive bleeding is clearly represented as

menstrual blood given that it flows from between her legs. However, we are told that this bleeding occurs whether she has her period or not: Lysiane thus appears as somehow unnatural. Moreover the mention of 'impudeur' implies that this is something that would be taboo.

Gilbert Durand, in his analysis of feminine archetypes, argues that an unease surrounding menstrual blood goes back to primordial time, stating that for most peoples, this blood is 'tabou' (Durand, p. 119). Moreover, Durand asserts that 'l'archétype de l'élément aquatique et néfaste est le sang menstruel' (Durand, p. 110). Since ancient times, therefore, menstrual blood is associated with water and is also considered harmful in some way, suggesting that women are somehow tarnished by this link and made dangerous by this biological phenomenon.

In his portrayal of Lysiane, Confiant seems to be perpetuating the ancient link between the sea and menstrual blood. This bleeding, which is considered to be menacing in ancient cultures, is exaggerated to such an extent in *Brin d'Amour* that Lysiane – like Antilia – is portrayed as menacing and unnatural. Again, Clément's analysis of the female as witch seem to describe what Confiant is doing in this portrayal, as she argues that '*la sorcière sert à joindre tous les bouts d'une culture difficile à vivre. [E]lle va du côté de l'animalité, des plantes, du non-humain*' (Cixous & Clément, p. 19). In this case, the witch acts as a mediatory force between the sea and the island, or in other words, between the painful past and the present. The situation in the Antilles is indeed 'difficile à vivre', as a result of the violence of the past, and so the female becomes a

mysterious, fluid force who is 'non-humain'. The problems of such a depiction will be examined after an analysis of Chamoiseau's character Kalamatia where we explore whether she too is portrayed as a 'sorcière'.

Unlike the feminine, beautiful creatures in Confiant's novel, Kalamatia does not have an intimate connection with the sea in the same sense but is initially defined as a warrior, almost masculine in stature, who comes to fight in the sea. Her stature ('une femme gigantesque' [p. 642]) sets her apart from other women to the extent that 'de prime abord, on ne savait pas trop bien si c'était un homme ou une femme: c'était une force de la nature' (p. 642). Kalamatia is described – like Lysiane and Antilia – as some form of non-human creature who is neither entirely male nor female. However, there is not the same fear attached to Kalamatia that is integral to the characters of Antilia and Lysiane. Balthazar feels relaxed with Kalamatia, 'comme avec une amie très ancienne' (*BDG*, p. 643). His physical and mental attraction to her lead him to follow her, imitating her actions in such a natural way that it feels like he had always carried out those actions, described as 'inscrites dans une nécessité ancienne' (p. 643). This repeated use of the word 'ancienne' implies that Kalamatia belongs to some sort of mythical age. This emphasis on her movements assigns her a mythological status, similar to that accorded to Lysiane and Antilia. Balthazar thus follows Kalamatia into battle 'sans même y penser' (p. 643), displeasing Kalamatia who wants to 'gagner seule ce combat' (p. 643). The reader is thus made aware of Kalamatia's strength, which is described in these masculine terms, and of her associations with the ancestors. In the floating boat it is always Kalamatia who is

in control but as night approaches, her body relaxes and she lets it drift in the water lying back ‘complètement apaisée’ (*BDG*, p. 646). Eventually, the ‘chabine’ pulls Balthazar to her, leaving him no choice in the matter, ‘Offusqué, il essaya de la serrer à son tour pour lui signifier qu’une femme devait rester une femme. Mais elle brisa ses gestes l’un après l’autre’(p. 646). The force of the ‘chabine’ appears super-human, leaving Balthazar terrified (‘pétrifié’ [p. 646]) to be treated by a woman ‘comme une proie’(p. 646).

Nevertheless, it is Kalamatia’s sexual ambiguity that also seems to attract Balthazar, as he is drawn to her by a force that is described as ‘presque masculine et en même temps toute femme’ (*BDG*, p. 643). His attraction to her marks one of the few episodes in contemporary Antillean literature when the possibility of bisexual, or even homoerotic tendencies are even vaguely alluded to.¹⁴¹ The androgynous traits of Kalamatia seem to be carefully constructed: her pronounced masculinity; the incorporation of the Creole word ‘kal’ in her name (which, as explained earlier, is a Creole word for the phallus). This impression is heightened in the description of the sex between Kalamatia and Balthazar where both characters seem to transcend their defined gender and penetrate each other:

Elle le renversait à son tour, et (avec ses doigts, ses orteils et sa langue) le pénétrait de partout, l’explorait comme lui-même l’explorait, à tel point

¹⁴¹ Arnold refers to the ‘suppression’ of homosexuality by Fanon and the subsequent virtual silence on the topic by Caribbean writers (1995, pp. 24-25). In *Biblique*, the male/female character(s), les Polo Carcel, are perhaps the first literary character(s) whose sexual identity is ambiguous. Richard Watts draws attention to Balthazar’s ‘repressed sexual desire for the male in Polo Carcel’ in ‘“Toutes ces eaux!” Ecology and Empire in Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Biblique des derniers gestes*’, *Modern Language Notes* 118.4 (2003) 895-910 (p. 906), marking out Chamoiseau as one of the rare Antillean writers to refer to homosexuality in his work.

qu'il croyait ressentir des sensations qu'elle devait éprouver, et la voyait réagir autant que lui à ce qu'il recevait. (*BDG*, p. 649)

It appears as though, in this sexual act, both Kalamatia and Balthazar lose themselves completely, as both their gender and identity are absolved through the intensity of their bodies' movements. This episode recalls Balthazar's experience in the slave ship examined in the first chapter, where he is 'penetrated' by the dead flesh of an anonymous woman. Our examination in Chapter 1 implies that this form of penetration represents the rebirth of Balthazar in the middle passage. Here, Kalamatia's penetration and the 'female' sensations experienced by the male Balthazar hint at another birth that also takes place at sea. For a brief second, Balthazar is able to become a woman. In this sense, the water acts as a form of amniotic fluid. The momentary transformation of Balthazar here can be explained by Richard Watts who argues that 'every significant episode or element in [his] life is somehow immersed in water' (p. 903), yet this comment does not tell us how this specific gender episode is significant. Watts' consideration of the role of water in Chamoiseau's *Biblique* highlights the metaphorical nature of the sea:

[W]ater and other liquid forms also function as narrative models of political action and cultural identity that productively resolve the tension at the heart of contemporary postcolonial literature between the rooted and the nomadic or – in metaphorical terms [...] between the solid and vaporous. (Watts, pp. 899-900)

Watts' interpretation indicates that Balthazar's momentary sexual transcendence could be read as a means of 'resolving' male sexual domination over the female. However, Watts' harmonious view of Chamoiseau's portrayal of the sea overlooks the monstrous aspect of this sexual union between Balthazar and Kalamatia, which initially left Balthazar 'pétrifié' (*BDG*, p. 646). I would argue that this sexual act cannot be considered simply in positive terms. Instead, the above analysis constructs the female character as mythological and unnatural but also as sexual. Yet the indifference of both Antilia and Lysiane and the androgyny of Kalamatia makes this female sexuality seems somewhat ambiguous and therefore requires closer investigation.

Part 2: The Sexual and Fertile Aspect of the Sea

The foregoing analysis highlights the intimate connection that both Confiant and Chamoiseau establish between Antilia, Lysiane, Kalamatia and the sea. However, as will be demonstrated, each creolist author's representation of the sea differs. The violence of the sea (and of the female) is seen as frightening and almost over-powering but it is still one that is confronted by the male character. For Confiant's characters, it is only the female, alienated characters who face the sea. In the case of Antilia and Lysiane, this intimacy has strong associations with sexuality. Antilia's sexuality is in evidence throughout the novel: the narrator, as a small child, recalls how Antilia would have sex with the many lorry drivers who came to deliver goods to Eau de Café's shop. After having sex, Antilia would go to the edge of the sea and there: 'la jeune femme

offrait alors, étendue en croix, la fente de son sexe aux lapements feutrés de l'océan. Toute habillée, yeux fermés raides-et-durs, poings serrés' (*EdC*, p. 58).

The gentle sensuality of her experience in the water is very different to the descriptions of the brutal sex she has with the lorry driver where 'la verge boursoufflée du chauffeur pénétr[ait] avec rage l'entrecuisse de la servante' (*EdC*, p. 57). The union with the water of the sea seems more intimate, almost as if it were some sort of purifying rite (also a plausible explanation for Lysiane's incessant vaginal bleeding), leading the other villagers to conclude that she does not belong to the human world – '[elle] n'était pas de notre monde' (p. 59) – and that '[l]'eau du sexe de la femme mélangée à l'eau de la mer, ça peut vous empoisonner la terre entière!' (*EdC*, p. 59). Lysiane's endless menstruation into the sea could be interpreted as a sign of her infertility, given that a woman cannot conceive while she is menstruating. Nevertheless, the excessive bleeding draws our attention to the fact that she is menstruating and so signals her status as a sexual female, and one who is of reproductive age. Therefore, Confiant's emphasis on Lysiane's menstruation reminds the reader that she is potentially fertile. However, as Girard's analysis of the representation of menstrual blood shows, this is what associates the female with violence: 'il faut la rapporter à la fois à l'impureté du sang criminellement versé et à la sexualité' (Girard, p. 57). This link made by Girard implies a complicity between female sexuality and violence, a point that is also inferred in Confiant's representation. Girard also offers an explanation for the masculine fascination – and fear – of menstrual blood, beyond its taboo nature:

Le fait que les organes sexuels de la femme soient le lieu d'une effusion de sang périodique a toujours prodigieusement impressionné les hommes dans toutes les parties du monde parce qu'il paraît confirmer l'affinité à leurs yeux manifeste entre la sexualité et les formes les plus diverses de la violence, toutes susceptibles, elles aussi, de provoquer des effusions de sang. (Girard, p. 57)

This examination of the male psyche is problematic in its generalising nature, but is useful for the purposes of this analysis because of the link Girard makes between female sexuality and *all* types of violence. He offers an explanation for the fear provoked by the female sexual organs and the fluids that emanate from them. This explanation seems to describe Confiant's portrayal of Lysiane, and even Antilia.

The link between sea, sex and fertility is also present in *Biblique*, and it is no coincidence that the sexual union between Kalamatia and Balthazar takes place in the sea. If we look closely, the way in which Kalamatia's body is described as a 'chatrou' (p. 646), a 'muqueuse' (p. 647) and her sex is referred to as a 'crabe aspirant' (p. 647), a striking link between her sexuality and the sea is established. All of these images combine to create the overall impression that Balthazar is being sucked into the body of this (masculine and predatory) woman, all of which takes place at sea. Moreover, the metaphors are all connected to sea creatures, suggesting that it is impossible for Balthazar to tell where Kalamatia's body ends and the sea begins. This sense is intensified in the course of this

extract. For when the couple eventually confront the sea monster, Kalamatia's 'kounia s'ouvr[e] comme une gueule' (p. 650), again implying that Balthazar is on the brink of being swallowed up into her sex. Kalamatia is clearly established here as a sexual, almost predatory female.

Moreover, the sex that takes place out at sea between Kalamatia and Balthazar on the boat pushes each character to a physical extreme, which involves excessive amounts of bodily fluids:

Il crut même qu'elle avait pissé plusieurs fois et se sentit traversé par des urines bouillantes, il dut pisser aussi et déféquer aussi, à tel point que leurs corps emmêlés baignaient dans une bouillie qui remplissait tout le fond du gommier. (*BDG*, p. 647)

The emphasis on the urine and faeces rather than sexual bodily fluids is unexpected for it draws attention to the way in which every aspect of both characters' bodies is completely consumed in the sexual act. Like Confiant's description of Lysiane's excessive bleeding, Chamoiseau here seems keen to push to the limit what is considered normal and acceptable, and implies that these bodily functions are beyond control. This recalls the link made by Girard between female sexual organs and violence. In Chamoiseau's case, the link could be extended from menstrual blood to all bodily fluids, as if any intimate sexual fluid triggers, or is at least associated with, violence. Once again, I would disagree with Watts' analysis of the representation of 'liquid forms' (p. 900) as a means of

‘resolving’ tensions:¹⁴² there is no indication here that Balthazar is overcoming violence but is instead *confronting* it through the body (fluids) of Kalamatia.

Torn between feelings of horror and immense sexual pleasure, Balthazar seems to be helpless: in ‘un avilissement sans fond’, which is also ‘une élévation totale’ (p. 648). The significance of this sexual episode seems to lie in the extreme level of physical pain and pleasure Balthazar experiences aboard the boat. Later he realises that the intensely sexual relationship with Kalamatia has taught him ‘à quel point l’amour des corps était chargé du don et de la prédation, du construire et du déconstruire, du désir du bien et de l’envie de mal’ (*BDG*, p. 658). In other words, the experience seems to give Balthazar a clarity about the fundamentally ambiguous and contradictory nature of love. This positive aspect of the overwhelming violence of his sexual acts with Kalamatia is significant, suggesting that violence is not always completely destructive. In this episode, Chamoiseau implies that if violence is confronted, a clearer understanding of it can perhaps be reached. For example, although Balthazar later recognises that of all his pleasurable, sexual encounters, ‘[i]l ne récoltait rien’ (p. 660), the only possible fertility stemmed from the violence he shared with Kalamatia: ‘leur gommier se remplissait de ces poissons charmés par leur sauce d’amour’ (p. 660). The vitality of the sexual relationship does not lead to human reproduction but it does bring the fish to the boat, implying that some sort of fertility can be found by confronting violence.

¹⁴² For Watts’, water is a crucial symbol for Chamoiseau in *Biblique*, see p. 224.

In the previous chapters, the sexual relationships examined are often non-reproductive. For example, the brutal sex that takes place in the site of the *cachot* seems to lead to the infertility of the earth surrounding it, evident in the barren trees. Or, when the sexual relationships are fertile, as is the case with the baby Bacchus born of rape,¹⁴³ the children born from these unions are profoundly damaged. The *jardin créole* is depicted by the creolist authors as a momentary idyll of contentment that is always temporary, and that also is a denial of the past. Amidst the overwhelming violence of the past then, female characters were read as sterile, a fact that was highlighted by the juxtaposition to the lush fertility of the vegetation. Our examinations of this link established by the creolist authors between sex and (human) infertility imply that the violence of the past continues to damage Antilleans but that at the same time, to try to escape this past is not a viable option, as the violence continues to manifest itself either in the continuity of human violence across the generations, or in the destructive falls of the *jardin créoles*. In the depiction of the sea, however, and in particular in the characters of Lysiane and Kalamatia, sexuality is associated with fertility. We will examine whether this association points to the possibility of a future identity in a way that we saw was not possible in our examinations of the *jardin créole*.

As identified above, the associations made between the sea and these female characters by Confiant and Chamoiseau are all allegorical ones that connect the women to nature. These mysterious, yet dangerously alluring women who are so intimately attached to the sea – through birth, menstruation and

¹⁴³ See Chapter 2, p. 141.

eventually death (for both Antilia and Lysiane disappear into the sea) – are very different to representations of the infertile, yet pure women of the garden. The ‘danger’ – Confiant implies – seems to lie in the link between women and the sea, which as Durand’s analysis demonstrates, is intrinsically one that is connected to biological rhythm and hence fertility.

Such representations of femininity seem to correspond to cultural clichés of the image of the woman as other – oceanic, dark, mysterious. Once again in *La Jeune née*, Cixous has identified this mechanism by formulating how women are often constructed as the opposite of men:

Où est-elle?

Activité/passivité,

Soleil/Lune,

Culture/Nature,

Jour/Nuit,

Père/Mère,

Tête/sentiment,

Intelligible/sensible,

Logos/Pathos. (Cixous & Clément, p. 115)

This list of binaries, each defining the male first, creates a hierarchical organisation in which the male is always privileged, according to Cixous. In their depiction of the feminine in the textual analysis examined above, the creolist authors do indeed seem to subscribe to this hierarchical system. The female characters Antilia, Lysiane and Kalamatia are so completely the product of the masculine imaginary and of the type of binary thinking identified by Cixous that these characters can be seen as symbols of the male authors' fears. In other words, Antilia, Lysiane and Kalamatia are not portrayed as real Antillean women but are simply allegories against which the masculine can be defined. This, of course, recalls our discussion in Chapter 2 of the colonised male's representation of the colonial female, who becomes a 'porous frontier' through which the men act out their tensions, desires and violence.

The intimate connection between Antilia, Lysiane and Kalamatia and the sea that is set up by the creolist authors clearly reinforces the emblematic nature of these female figures. They are linked to all the sea's associations of mystery, darkness and fear, summarised here in Michelet's description: '[l]et us not be astonished that the Sea, darkling and unfathomed in its profound depths, should always appear formidable to the human imagination' (Michelet, p. 19). Our examination of these tired images of the female certainly corresponds to Arnold's accusations of the 'masculinist' writing of the creolist authors. Arnold's argument could explain, in part, why the creolist authors seem to resort to such a stereotypical portrayal of their female characters in relation to the sea. However, this sort of reading does not take into account the ambiguity of the representations

examined. On the one hand, the creolist authors seem to draw attention to a frightening, feminine sexuality but on the other hand, they also highlight its fertility in a way they avoided doing in connection to the gardens, when the sexual attraction was accompanied by fertility in the garden that eventually came to nothing. I do not believe that an explanation for the images of fertility lies in a positive reading of the sea, for it has too many negative, terrifying associations. Instead, this fertility, which is so intimately connected with the sea, takes us back to the question of origins.

Females as Symbols of Origins

Given that the sea is considered to be the birthplace of Antilleans, the fertile aspect of our three female characters can be read as a symbol of Antillean origins, as an analysis of the three texts implies. The connection between the sea and Antillean origins is visible not only in Antilia's name, but in the manner of her mysterious arrival in the village. There are several different accounts given of her arrival, implying that her origins are indeed as confused as those of the Antilles themselves.¹⁴⁴ Given the fantastical qualities of Antilia's character, the reader is forced to suspend reality and accept the multiple origins that seem to lead to her existence. In the 'first' version, Antilia emerges from the sea and is transformed from 'petite fille' to 'femme' in just a matter of hours, clearly evoking the myth

¹⁴⁴ The narrative is deliberately vague, as if wanting the reader to doubt the narrator's ability and instead see the difficulties of uncovering the truth in the face of so many possibilities, for example another version of Antilia's existence is introduced by the words, 'Selon une autre parole' (*EdC*, p. 20).

of Manman Dlo. Antilia thus appears as both a magical yet terrifying creature born from and returning to the Ocean. However, towards the end of the text, Eau de Café provides another explanation for Antilia's birth, telling her nephew (the narrator) that she is the mother of Antilia, who was taken away from her at birth. Rather than bury the umbilical cord under a tree, as was the custom, 'on l'a voltigé à la mer' (p. 327). This apparent disregard for the umbilical cord, which is traditionally buried in the land to attach a newborn baby to the place, is clearly symbolic. It suggests that there is no possible way for Antilia to be embedded to the land or to her ancestors, and instead her origins are left to float in the mysterious depths of the sea. The abandoned umbilical cord also symbolises the impossibility of tracing Antillean roots because of the whole colonial process. This impression is reinforced by the knowledge that we will never be able to define Antilia or know where she comes from for, as Eau de Café tells the narrator, 'Tu ne pourras jamais comprendre qui fut Antilia. Abandonne ta quête...' (p. 361). Therefore, Confiant seems to be using the different versions of Antilia's birth to make a point about Antillean origins, suggesting that in the vast space of the sea, Antillean origins were dispersed (by the middle passage) and are thus irretrievable.

Even more significantly, Eau de Café has no idea who is the father of Antilia: 'Elle a eu pour pères Themistocle l'ancêtre, Julien son arrière-petit-fils, le Blanc Creole de Cassagnac, Major Thémoléon [...] et d'autres dont il est bien

inutile de révéler les titres (p. 353).¹⁴⁵ This uncertainty clearly symbolises the many ‘fathers’, the many races and origins of the Creoles. In this novel, almost every racial stratum of Antillean society is a possible father to Antilia, a fact that seems to symbolise the islands’ history as a whole, whose fathers’ origins are impossible to pinpoint exactly because of the middle passage. This inability to trace Antilia’s precise genealogy is highlighted in the village’s initial suspicion of Eau de Café’s own origins, ‘Qui était ma mère et la mère de ma mère?’ (p. 355). This plaintive question asked by Eau de Café evokes the response Papa-feuilles gives to Papi in *Chronique* when he is asked where he learned his horticultural skills: ‘Mais la question est: d’où vient la graine, et la graine de la graine?’ (CSM, p. 185). It would appear that this question of origins does indeed underpin the creolist authors’ fictional work.

At the beginning of this chapter (p. 205), we referred to the ancient symbol of the ‘mer/mère’, which seems strongly related to the fertility of the sea. We have seen how the sea is often represented by Chamoiseau and Confiant as a place of sexual danger, but it is also constructed as potentially maternal. The likening of the sea to a mother is made explicitly in the opening lines of *Eau de café*, where the sound made by the sea reminds Eau de Café of a woman in the painful throes of labour, ‘On aurait juré le ventre d’une négresse qui peine à mettre bas’ (p. 11). This image immediately reinforces the association between

¹⁴⁵ This inability to name the father could be an allusion to the matrifocal family in the Antilles, which has been examined in detail by Richard D Burton, *La Famille coloniale: la Martinique et la mère patrie 1789-1992* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994) and Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries – Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).

the ‘mer’ and ‘mère’. This impression is intensified with the knowledge that Antilia was born from the sea (see p. 213; pp. 234-235).

In *Biblique*, the maternal association of the sea is evoked in the battle between Kalamatia and the sea monster (see p. 220). It is significant that the female monster who emerges from the sea resembles one of Balthazar’s ‘mothers’, connoting the maternal nature of the sea twice over. Moreover, it is another mother figure, Man L’Oubliée, who comes to their rescue. While Watts has interpreted Yvonne as an allegory for France, ‘If Yvonne Cléoste is to be read allegorically, then, she can only be read as a figure for Empire’ (Watts, p. 905), I would argue that she is more representative of another domination – a maternal one. Chancé’s comments back up this suggestion, as she describes this battle between two of Balthazar’s mother figures as, ‘la dernière entre le mal et le bien, entre Yvonne Cléoste et Man L’Oubliée [...] assurant le triomphe du bien et de la bonne mère’.¹⁴⁶

While the ‘good mother’ wins in *Biblique*, the violence of the other ‘mother’, Yvonne remains. The contrast between the two maternal characters establishes Yvonne as a bad mother figure. Yvonne is of course a malevolent presence in Balthazar’s life since her attempts to destroy his biological mother at his birth – she tries to kill Balthazar’s mother with dangerous plants and by casting spells at the moment of birth. Her interference in his birth can be seen to symbolise the multiple origins of Balthazar and also reinforces the recurrent

¹⁴⁶ Dominique Chancé, ‘De *Chronique des sept misères* à *Biblique des derniers gestes*, Patrick Chamoiseau est-il baroque?’ *Modern Language Notes* 118.4 (2003) 867-894, (p. 890).

theme of extreme violence at the point of birth, apparent throughout the works of the creolist authors. The struggle between the two 'mothers' out at sea, the locus of Antillean origins, seems pointed. The creolist authors' representations of the sea's maternal aspect point highlight the ambivalent symbolism of the maternal role of the sea as the place of Antillean origins, yet also the terrifying nature of those origins. Let us examine this paradox further.

The almost complete destruction of Kalamatia by the sea monster (see p. 204) reminds the reader that the sea also takes life as well as giving life. Although the sea is represented by the authors as a space of fertility, the sterilising effects of the (originary) violence are also present. For example, in *Eau de Café*, the narrator tells us how 'La mer de Grand-Anse nous refusait tout poisson, hormis quelques rares crabes de mer et des poulpes-satrouilles qui vous collent aux mains' (p. 357). The sterility of the sea is also emphasised in *Brin d'Amour*, 'la mer est bréhaigne', and it is hated by the villagers because of its apparent refusal to provide them with anything. The narrator in *Eau de Café* suggests the reason for this resistance simply shows the strength of the sea, and its refusal to submit to any orders: 'Elle gouverne nos désirs et nos refus. Elle nous impose sa splendeur stérile et nous met au défi' (*EdC*, p. 81). The power of the sea is constructed as a force that can give life but that can also take it away. This notion is summarised in *Brin d'Amour* where the reader is left with the poignant image of Lysiane's mother, standing by the edge of the sea: '[une] statue fragile plantée dans la noirceur pailletée d'or sur le sable volcanique [qui] implorait les flots de lui rendre le fruit de ses entrailles' (*BA*, p. 245). The sea is once again the taker,

and not the giver, of life. This almost contradictory representation of the sea as a place both of fertility and birth, and of sterility and death suggests that the sea is potentially a mother but that its complicity in the middle passage – the original violence of colonialism – has rendered it a Bad Mother. While the female characters in this analysis are associated with the Mother and therefore the notion of birth and origins, they are clearly Bad Mothers. This places them in a particular category, emphasising again their dangerous qualities, which have already been linked to sexual attractiveness. Durand confirms the links between this figure – ‘la Mère Terrible’ – and sexuality and destruction:

Cette ‘Mère Terrible’ est le modèle inconscient de toutes les sorcières, vieilles hideuses et borgnes, fées carabosses qui peuplent le folklore et l’iconographie. (Durand, p. 113)

Durand’s description of the Bad Mother figure as universal in folklore corresponds to the characterisation of Antilia, Lysiane and Kalamatia as dangerous, menacing females. Yet, there is an important difference in the authors’ representation of these female characters. For Chamoiseau, as outlined above, the Good Mother (in the form of Man L’Oubliée) succeeds in vanquishing the Bad, evil Mother, Yvonne Cléoste, and Kalamatia does not die. This could be read as an allegory for a tentative, positive step in the overthrowing of all dominations. Chamoiseau thus implies that if violence is confronted, even if the struggle is terrifying and violent, there is hope of freedom at the end. Confiant, on the other hand, does not depict any of his characters as confronting the sea. Although

Antilia and Lysiane both face the sea, they eventually disappear into it, with no clear explanation of where they have gone. Instead, the 'deaths' of these female characters are as mysterious as their relationship to the sea throughout the entire novel. Their unexplained disappearances suggest that Confiant is unwilling to confront the sea in the same way as Chamoiseau.

However, this difference between the authors does not eradicate the terrifying sexual aspect of the women, which can be explained in part by Neumann's analysis of human consciousness. In his analysis of the emerging ego, breaking free from its 'parents', Neumann argues that 'the unconscious should be regarded as predominantly feminine',¹⁴⁷ because of its ability to give life and destroy it. In contrast to this, the ever-growing consciousness is considered by him to be 'predominantly masculine'. The designation of masculine and feminine properties to the ego and to the unconscious respectively raise the same sort of problems as those identified by Cixous and Clément and examined above in the construction of the female as objectified other. Nevertheless, Neumann's representation here provides an interesting perspective from which to examine the creolist authors' portrayals of femininity as a representation of the threat posed by the unconscious and by the desire for regression to an Antillean ego that is trying hard to establish itself, a struggle that is evident partly through the female characters under discussion.

¹⁴⁷ Erich Neumann, *The Origins of History and Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 1954), p. 215.

The terrifying sexual aspect of Antilia, Lysiane and Kalamatia and their intimate associations with the sea are all described in a violent way that threatens to submerge the male character. And indeed, the sea itself is also depicted in a similar way as the following extract of the narrator's description of the sea's nightly assault on him from *Eau de Café* demonstrates:

La mer ne m'avait pas accordé une miette de répit. Elle avait assiégé mon auvent, labouré toute l'étendue du toit, clamé des douleurs qui m'avaient glacé d'effroi. Je m'attendais à tout instant à la voir envahir ma chambre et me rouler-mater, dans son chamaillis aux allures de rancune immémoriale. (*EdC*, p. 102)

Like Balthazar's 'assault' by Kalamatia, here the sea terrifies the narrator, depriving him of sleep and threatening to submerge him completely. The word 'envahir' directly convey a sense of invasion, indicating the ferocious power of the sea. Yet despite his terror, the narrator is nevertheless drawn to the sea, and rather than despising it (as do the rest of the villagers) he is both apprehensive yet admiring of it. This description of the narrator's assault by the sea in *Eau de café* evokes the 'ébats' between Balthazar and Kalamatia – it is the female who is engulfing the male each time, leaving him powerless in any battle between them. Again, the male feels threatened by the sea that is associated with a sexually powerful female force which, like Neumann's toothed vagina, threatens to swallow him up whole. The physical strength of the sea and of Kalamatia

respectively destabilises the male in each text, forcing him into a situation in which he is rendered impotent.

This scenario might be interpreted as a narrative of identity development in which the engulfing sea is depicted as a (female) obstructive figure to the Antillean (male) ego-development, sucking the (male) protagonist down into the depths of unconsciousness and preventing him from progressing. Neumann outlines that in identity formation, such obstacles must present themselves and be overcome, initiation-style, in order for the ego (the male) to emerge strengthened:

The story of the hero, as set forth in the myths, is the history of this self-
emancipation of the ego, struggling to free itself from the power of the
unconscious and to hold its own against overwhelming odds. (*The Origins
and the History of Consciousness*, p. 127).

In the case of the creolist authors, the 'overwhelming odds' can be read as their origins in the sea (recalling in turn those of slavery), which always seem to be lurking, threatening to suck the male under in a terrible way, placing the male writer in an ever-present danger. The presence of the violence of origins, and their 'unknowability', as well as the threat posed to the ego at all times by any confrontation with symbols of the unconscious, all stress the fragility of the emerging Creole identity.

Therefore, despite the slightly more positive representation of the sea offered in Chamoiseau's depiction of Kalamatia which indicates that the sea

offers a possible alternative vision for Antilleans, we must conclude that the necessary confrontation with the sea, and therefore the past, is not yet ready to be undertaken. This conclusion concurs with Dominique Chancé's observation that '[Chamoiseau] n'abandonne pas sans nostalgie la certitude, les enracinements dans un lieu clos, le retour à l'origine et à la mer, les croyances idéologiques' ('Patrick Chamoiseau est-il baroque?', p. 893). Confiant and Chamoiseau both depict the sea as a space where the violence of the past hovers and lurks, yet is not truly confronted, even if the desire to do so is present. Instead, the menacing history of the sea is embodied by the creolist authors in the mother figure, recalling the sacrificial slave mother examined at the end of the second chapter. There is a recurrent – and important – motif then in the authors' use of the female where she is constructed as a symbol of an impressive yet terrifying fertility. This fascination with female fecundity and its power forefronts the notion of origins in the work of Confiant and Chamoiseau, which seem to be threatening to engulf the Creole masculine voice that is gradually emerging. The violent history of the Antilles, the authors imply, cannot be escaped from, or denied but neither can it be overcome. Instead, we return to the Creole voice, bringing us back to the process of writing. The next chapter will examine whether through the productive process of writing (the closest the male authors can get to female fertility), the violence of the past can be laid to rest.

Chapter 5 – Writing, Creativity and Violence

So far in this thesis we have examined a number of literary motifs and themes that may be seen as literary representations of attempts to come to terms with the violence and trauma of the Antillean past. Yet none of these themes or motifs suggests that Chamoiseau and Confiant have found a formula that is wholly successful. Their failure is often expressed by the sense that the male impotency brought on by colonialism and its ongoing influence seems to have pervaded the natural environment, a complex set of ideas in which metaphors of sterility and of ‘unnatural’ births abound. In this final chapter before the conclusion, I will examine how this sense of emasculation and even sterilisation impacts directly on the Creole writer’s view of his own voice – the literary voice that is seen as emerging after centuries of domination. Given the number of comprehensive and insightful studies that have already been done on the role of the writer in Antillean fiction,¹⁴⁸ and the concept of ‘oraliture’, the word used by the creolist authors to describe the original art of the *conteurs*.¹⁴⁹ I will not focus so much on the role of the writer in the fiction of the creolist authors, but more on an analysis

¹⁴⁸ In the Introduction two such studies were examined: Dominique Chancé’s *L’Auteur en souffrance* and Lydie Moudileno’s *L’Ecrivain antillais au miroir de sa littérature*. In each of these important works, the figure of the writer in recent Antillean fiction is explored in depth. Chancé in particular indicates that the creolist authors (and the authors of *Eloge* are mentioned specifically) have assigned themselves an extremely difficult and tense role. She suggests that for Confiant and Chamoiseau, the act of writing is perceived to be a form of betrayal of the orality of their Creole roots and ancestors and in particular of their ‘symbolic father’, *le conteur* (*L’Auteur en souffrance*, p. 68).

¹⁴⁹ Chamoiseau and Confiant each give an indication of the importance of the *conteur* to them. Chamoiseau identifies how ‘l’écrivain se tourne vers le conteur’ to find out how to insert ‘la parole’ in his work in ‘Que faire de la parole? Dans la tracée mystérieuse de l’oral à l’écrit’, in *Ecrire la ‘parole de nuit’: la nouvelle littérature antillaise*, ed. Ralph Ludwig (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 151-158 (p. 156). Confiant, in a collection dedicated to the *conteurs*, also identifies his debt as a writer to them ‘puisque le conteur créole est l’ancêtre de l’écrivain créole’ in *Les Maîtres de la parole créole* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 14.

of the themes and motifs of sterility, birth and creation in relations to the art of writing in the creolists' representation of their literary craft and vocation. In this chapter we return to the notion of writing and examine whether it is through the process of writing itself that the creolist authors deal most effectively with the trauma of the past.

The first part of this chapter begins by examining how the authors create an impression that their Creole voice is being continually silenced, a phenomenon discussed in terms of metaphorical 'sterilisation' in their accounts of their childhood and adolescence. I will then explore how the authors, through their work, attempt to fight against this sense of powerlessness and of *impuissance* through the process of writing which is presented in terms of fertility. We will begin by examining with the authors' joint literary project – *Lettres créoles*. This text traces the 'birth' of the Creole literary voice and embodies the authors' own writing, explaining how and why they came to write. In this chapter, I will study how the creolist authors attempt a cycle of reproduction that will lead to the birth of a truly Antillean literature, with the *conteur* as the first genitor in the process. This exploration will give a sense of the authors' determination to establish particular origins for themselves, and the reasons behind this desire. In so doing, I will identify the literary genealogy that Chamoiseau and Confiant are compiling in *Lettres créoles* and how it reflects their view of their own literary voice, and perhaps reveals something about it. The inherent risk of their effort is invoked by Gallagher, who comments on the teleological nature of the creolist authors' writing, whose 'dogmatic pre-scription would seem more likely to produce

formulaic rather than creative results' (*Soundings in French Caribbean Writing*, p. 39). This implies that in the authors' anxiety to underline the importance of the Creole voice, the act of writing loses its creative aspect and in this sense becomes, somewhat paradoxically, a fruitless task.

Part 1: Silencing and Sterilisation

The colonised male, as we have established from Loomba's analysis in Chapter 2 is desperate to claw back some power from his colonisers and also to assert his masculinity in the face of the feminising process of colonialism. Arnold's accusations of the creolist authors' 'masculinist writing' (Arnold, p. 21), examined in the previous chapter, focus on the way in which this feminisation impacts on the work of male Antillean authors, Chamoiseau and Confiant included. He argues that these authors need to reclaim their own masculinity, a difficult task 'since the position of real man is already occupied by the other of colonial domination' (Arnold, p. 27). Arnold concludes that the only position available to the creolist authors 'is that of castrated storyteller whose language remains obscure, muffled or screamed (read: hysterical), at all events turned away from the direct production of meaning' (Arnold, p. 32). This quotation draws attention to the violence facing these authors who are 'castrated' in several ways. Here, Arnold indicates that it is the voice of the authors that is silenced, a recurring motif in Antillean literature. Yet, the word 'castration' implies that the authors' sexual organs are affected, emphasising the extent to which the physical and psychological violence of colonialism has rendered them metaphorically

impotent. This chapter will examine the connection between these two notions and consider whether the predicament described by Arnold does indeed leave the creolist authors silenced and sterilised.

As with most Martinican children of the 1950s, the first language the creolist authors encountered was Creole. However when they went to school, they were suddenly confronted with French, and expected to abandon their native language. In their *récits d'enfance* both authors have given an account of their experiences with French in the classroom.¹⁵⁰ In *Ravines du devant-jour*, Confiant's initial formal encounter with French is recounted. As a *chabin*,¹⁵¹ Confiant indicates that he is already familiar with French, yet that he still understands nothing of what his primary teacher says. The narrator addresses his younger self and recalls the initial encounter with French in the formal set-up of the classroom, and how it makes him feel:

¹⁵⁰ The *récits d'enfance* have received a certain amount of critical attention as the following articles indicate: Suzanne Crosta covers their general thematic concerns, 'Maronner le récit d'enfance: *Antan d'enfance* de Patrick Chamoiseau et *Ravines du devant-jour* de Raphaël Confiant' (1999), retrieved 3rd November 2003 from http://lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/docs/crosta/chamoiseau_confiant.html; while Mary Gallagher examines the literary genre of autobiography for Chamoiseau ('Re-membering Caribbean Childhoods: Saint-John Perse's "Eloges" and Patrick Chamoiseau's *Antan d'enfance*', in *Francophone Caribbean Today: Literature, Language, and Culture*, eds. Gertrud Aub-Buscher & Beverly Ormerod Noakes (Mona, Jamaica: The University of West Indies Press, 2003), pp. 45-59. An analysis of the importance of colour and race as outlined in Confiant's childhood autobiography is carried out by Valérie Loichot, 'La Créolité à l'oeuvre dans *Ravines du devant-jour* de Raphaël Confiant', *The French Review* 71; (1998), 621-631 (pp. 621-627). Thomas C. Spear examines the increasing numbers of Antillean authors writing childhood accounts in 'L'Enfance créole: la nouvelle autobiographie antillaise' in *Récits de vie de l'Afrique et des Antilles: exil, errance, enracinement*, ed. Suzanne Crosta (Sainte Foy: GRELCA, 1998), pp. 143-167. All of these studies are important contributions to our understanding of the creolist authors' childhood *récits* yet our focus here is not so much on the literary genre, or their socio-cultural context but more on what these *récits* tell us about the authors' introduction to reading, writing and the tools with which they are able to achieve these.

¹⁵¹ Confiant indicates that the *chabins* are whiter-skinned than most Martinicans and therefore higher up the social ladder.

Tu ne saisis pas un mot du français qu'elle te parle, si différent dans ses intonations et son phrasé de celui auquel tu es habitué. Alors tu te crispes sur ta petite personne et tu essaies de te faire oublier' (*RDJ*, p. 77)¹⁵²

The use of the second-person narrator throughout the text is effective as it seems to create a direct dialogue between the narrator and his younger self whilst also establishing a distance between them. The physical impact of the words on the narrator is emphasised; confronted by these strange words, the small boy clearly feels threatened. His attempt to make himself unnoticeable, and even invisible, contrasts with the boy's usual fiery nature and points to the power of language to wound. The use of the verb 'crisper' in particular emphasises the tension of his 'small' body, as if he has been paralysed by his inability to follow the French. Of course it is not the actual language that has had such an immediate effect but the narrator's relationship to it and the context in which it is being used.

The hostility seems to come less from the language itself than from the context, and from the unfamiliar way in which the teacher pronounces the French words, which is later described as the 'français-France' (*RDJ*, p. 79). When the children speak Creole they are punished and are either forced to wear a collar that prevents them from speaking, or the teacher hits them on their fingers.¹⁵³

Although the narrator refuses to respond to such treatment, it is clear that these practices construct a fearful association with French from a young age. Racism

¹⁵² Loichot adds that despite this initial alienation from the language, Confiant nevertheless goes on to write in French, ('La Créolité à l'oeuvre', p. 629).

¹⁵³ The practice evokes the way in which the slaves were gagged as punishment (cf. Nicolas, vol. I, p. 172).

plays a part too, and the teacher differentiates the children from one another by the colour of their skin. Those with whiter skin, like the young narrator, are especially encouraged to move away from their native Creole, because, as the teacher tells him: ‘Un si joli petit garçon à la peau claire tel que toi [...] ne doi[t] pas salir ta bouche à employer des mots grossiers...’ (*RDJ*, p. 80). However, her words do not have the desired effect and in revenge for this treatment at the hands of the teacher, *Confiant* details the teacher’s fall from grace. Hearing a pupil speak in Creole one day, she rebukes him in injurious Creole, leading to a collective horror: ‘De ce jour, son prestige s’effon[d] à nos yeux’ (*RDJ*, p. 82) for nobody knew she could even speak Creole. This disillusionment represents a situation laden with hypocrisy that creates opposition between the two languages, and renders both of them alien for the children. It appears as though the teacher has only been performing French and that underneath the *façade*, the Creole self that she has tried so hard to suffocate remains. The importance of the exterior image is highlighted by Fanon, who comments on the expectations of those who have been to France, and educated there: ‘On ne pardonne pas, à celui qui affiche une supériorité, de faillir au devoir’ (1952, p. 19). This attitude clearly comes from the notion that speaking French will open doors, an attitude that the creolist authors are attempting to challenge by showing how oppressed Antilleans are by the language and values that come from France.

Echoes of *Confiant*’s description of the role of the teacher in schools are present in Chamoiseau’s *Une enfance créole II* where ‘le Maître’ also paralyses the children by rigidly imposing French and vilifying the Creole language. The

title given the teacher clearly reinforces the teacher's status and power, as if he is the master of the school in the same way that the *béké* continues to be the master of the sugar cane fields and banana plantations. It also suggests that the colonial system continues to structure the very existence of Antilleans – from childhood onwards. The poignant image of the little boy who is desperate to express himself and 'aurait pu envoyer mille mots' (p. 91) in Creole to describe the pictures the 'Maître' gives them in an attempt to make them speak. However, 'le Maître l'avait rendu muet d'autant plus muet que maintenant il soupirait à chaque heure: *Ô cette engeance crréole n'a rien à dirre!*' (p. 91). The boy has therefore been silenced because he feels he cannot express himself properly in French. Like Confiant's description of the teacher's performance of French, seen in her slippage into Creole, Chamoiseau's mocking exaggeration of the 'r' sounds also suggests that even for the 'Maître', this 'French' way of speaking French is not entirely natural. The hypercorrection of the 'r' stems from the perceived difficulty Antilleans have pronouncing the French 'r'.¹⁵⁴ Again, like Confiant's teacher, Chamoiseau's narrator describes the constant threat of physical abuse, seen here in the tamarind branch kept by the 'Maître' above the board and used to hit the children when they 'creolised' the French in any way. The image of the school inciting the children's shame of their own language corresponds to what the creolist authors term in *Eloge* 'l'expérience stérile' (EC, p. 13) of *francisation*,

¹⁵⁴ Fanon, in his chapter 'Le Noir et le langage' examines the attitude of the Antillean towards the French language and outlines a similar situation to the one portrayed by Confiant. He refers to 'le mythe du martiniquais-qui-mange-les-R' (*Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 16) whereas 'celui qui [...] possède la maîtrise de la langue est excessivement craint; il faut faire attention à lui, c'est un quasi-Blanc' (*Ibid.*, p. 16). The association between fear and language is demonstrated in both of the creolist authors' portrayals of learning to speak French.

which has been enforced on Antilleans. As a result, the authors argue, Antilleans have been forced to suppress their inner Creole selves which have been ‘mise[s] sous verrous’ (*EC*, p. 14). It appears that Antilleans do indeed see themselves through the gaze of the Other, creating a self-imposition of French values which in turn crush the importance of their own native Creole language. What is sterilising about this situation is that the inner Creole voice cannot emerge from the stifling force of French. However, the situation is more complex than the straightforward binaries of French and Creole.

Whatever the pressures and negative experiences surrounding French, it is also the language in which the authors now choose to write.¹⁵⁵ The inevitable tensions of this pull between the two languages and all their associations will be examined below in a study of the authors’ fictional writing. Here, we return to the metaphor of sterility to examine how the authors manage to write despite this apparently oppressive system, and what ‘product’ (if any) is created. Chamoiseau expresses his own doubts on this point in a rather grotesque parody of pregnancy:

Je soupçonnais que toute domination (la silencieuse plus encore) germe et se développe à l’intérieur même de ce que l’on est. Qu’insidieuse, elle neutralise les expressions les plus intimes des peuples dominés. (*EPD*, p. 21)

The verbs present in this description of ‘every domination’ as it ‘germinates’ and ‘develops’ are rather sinister. These words create the impression that these

¹⁵⁵ The paradoxical nature of the way in which the creolist authors use the Creole language is highlighted in Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux (2003, pp. 87-89).

oppressive forces are not simply imposed on the surface but instead embed themselves inside the Antillean self, like a form of parasite that feeds from the host's cells, growing at its expense. Chamoiseau implies through words such as 'germe' and 'à l'intérieur' that the oppression grows inside him, almost like a malformed, unnatural foetus. The metaphorical associations take us back to the notion of digestion explored in the previous section except that in this case, emphasis is on the sterilisation of self-expression. Such a dramatic statement conveys a sense of the verbal suffocation felt by Chamoiseau, a representative of the Antillean population at large. The sterilising impact of the dominating force is clearly damaging. However, as Chamoiseau's description of his first introduction to French indicates, it is not so much the language itself that is oppressive, but the politics with which it is enmeshed.

In *Une enfance créole II* we read how Chamoiseau is first introduced in kindergarten to French in the form of an oral language but that experience holds none of the trauma or alienation that occurs at school. The little boy hears songs that make him forget the strangeness of the situation; he chants the letters of the alphabet with his classmates, unaware that they constitute another language – that of the coloniser, the other – aware only that he loves the sound and unfamiliarity of this collective activity.

Man Salinière, un jour ou l'autre, accrochait de grosses lettres à son petit tableau. Dans un silence intrigué, elle articulait des sons chantants *A B C D* [...] Chanter en ce temps-là se faisait avec l'âme. On devenait le chant,

et le chant était sentiment vrai [...] On se donnait sans crainte, sans chercher à comprendre. [L]e négriillon se sentait envoûté, et il chantait, il chantait Aaaaa Béeée Céeée Dééeéééé. (*EC II*, pp. 39-40)

This extract reveals the excitement of his first hearing this new language – there is not a trace of the sense of alienation and marginalisation that occurs later in the more formal context of primary school. The innocence of the child’s perspective implies that it is perhaps too early for politics. The novelty of the French (apparent in the ‘sans chercher à comprendre’) is embraced by the children “sans crainte” through its sound. This experience is very different to later encounters in school, where those who do not understand French are ridiculed and are then ignored for being unable to follow, destined for the sugar cane fields. Initially, however, there is no fierce opposition set up between the two languages, simply the discovery of the new language through sound and rhythm. In other words, the narrator encounters another culture and language and initially feels comfortable with such unfamiliarity. It is only when the language is later transferred into the classroom situation, where all the loaded associations with French and metropolitan France enter the scene, school being part of the state apparatus in France of course, that the tensions arise. The difference between the innocent enjoyment of French and the later, more tense relation to it is the interference of politics when a power structure comes into play.

The oppression of the weight of French culture undoubtedly urges the authors to redress the balance by asserting the Creole of their early childhood.

For, as Suzanne Crosta's exploration of both childhood *récits* indicates, Creole is constructed as the native language of each author. With reference to Chamoiseau's *récit*, Crosta asserts: 'si le français est respecté, c'est en définitive le créole qui est valorisé comme langue maternelle, d'autant plus que celle-ci véhicule ses sentiments et sa culture' (Crosta, p. 11). This quotation emphasises the importance of the authors' mother tongue. However, as Chancé points out, it is not so much the maternal but the paternal figure that is important to the creolist authors. She states that, 'l'écrivain antillais est avant tout un orphelin et un bâtard' (*L'Auteur en souffrance*, p. 68),¹⁵⁶ because of his lack of a real father. Derek Walcott too evokes this sense of the absent father and the problem it poses when confronting the past:

I accept this archipelago of the Americas. I say to the ancestor who sold me, and to the ancestor who bought me, I have no father, I want no such father, although I can understand you, black ghost, white ghost, when you both whisper 'history', for if I attempt to forgive you both I am falling into your idea of history which justifies and explains and expiates, and it is not mine to forgive, my memory cannot summon any filial love, since your features are anonymous and erased and I have no wish and no power to pardon. (Walcott, p. 64)

¹⁵⁶ Similarly, in *Lettres créoles* the Creolist authors describe the Creole language as 'orphaned' (p. 94) on several occasions – firstly by the békés (despite their contribution to its 'birth') and then by the *mulâtres* as they increasingly had access to education and so embraced the French language as a medium through which they could achieve the same status as the Whites. The close connection between the Creole language and the Creole literary voice is embodied in the figure of the *conteur*, identified earlier as a heroic figure for the authors and so the parallel between language and writer is unavoidable.

Walcott here rejects both the white father and the African one for the role each played in history. He does not deny their existence, however, but instead refuses to engage in any relationship with them. The impossibility for him to find any 'filial love' and the absence of violence in the words he uses to describe the inability to forgive seems to condemn these two possible fathers while simultaneously suggesting that he has accepted the past. Conversely, the creolist authors are – as Chancé accurately describes – 'en deuil de ce père' (*L'Auteur en souffrance*, p. 68) and so have not yet accepted his absence. Emasculated and fatherless, as well as increasingly distanced from the maternal language of Creole through their education, it is unsurprising that writing – a way of affirming their identity – not only becomes so important to the creolist authors, but is expressed in a form that connects it to the assertion of the masculine potential for creation.

Writing and reading are interwoven into the authors' upbringing and as each author's account of their adolescence implies, seem to determine the authors' way of life. Indeed the coming of age of both Confiant and Chamoiseau parallels their relationship with textuality. The attitude to reading in French displays an ambivalent attitude torn between the pleasure of books and reading (and writing) on the one hand, and all the negative associations of French on the other, leading to a sense of being crushed in a world to which the authors feel they do not belong.

In *Le Cahier de romances* for example,¹⁵⁷ Confiant recalls his first introduction to literature, reconstructing the mystery and excitement of the adolescent who hides in his local bookshop. The bookshop is described as ‘ce temple profane’ (CR, p. 37) and seems to be a forbidden and secret world for the narrator. He devours the novels, his pleasure made clear by the description of how he read: ‘Tous satisfaisaient ta faim de lecture et, pour de bon, tu lisais comme tu mangeais. Journallement, pleinement, avec satisfaction et bonheur’ (p. 38).¹⁵⁸ There is none of the resistance to French that was seen above in our examination of his childhood reactions. Instead, the association made between eating and reading implies that both are equally necessary activities for the boy’s survival. This impression is reinforced by the narrator’s complete loss of appetite when the bookshop closes down.

Chamoiseau, in *Ecrire en pays dominé*, describes a similar attitude to reading in his adolescence. The text is littered with references to the literary influences who have informed his own writing, telling the reader how ‘les livres-aimés, les auteurs-aimés [...] m’habitent en désordre’ (EPD, p. 23).¹⁵⁹ Unlike Confiant, however, these literary references come from all over the world.

¹⁵⁷ *Le Cahier de romances* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000). Future quotations from this novel will be referenced as CR.

¹⁵⁸ Confiant’s use of the 2nd person here is effective (and is also used in *Ravines du devant-jour*) for it creates a distance between the adolescent and adult narrator and thus emphasises the innocence of this avid desire to read.

¹⁵⁹ The way in which Chamoiseau deals with this domination is examined by Kathleen Gyssels in ‘Du Paratexte pictural dans *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (André et Simone Schwarz-Bart) au paratexte sériel dans *Ecrire au pays dominé* (Patrick Chamoiseau)’ in *French Literature Series*, 29 (2002), 197-213. Gyssels highlights the multiple voices introduced by Chamoiseau into this text in the form of a ‘paratexte sériel’. This deliberate opacity, Gyssels argues, is a means of freeing the mind from the coloniser. What is important for the purpose of my own analysis is the metaphors of sterility, birth and creation that abound in this text.

Nevertheless, reading is also a solitary pursuit for him; he describes how in his adolescence he would read into the dead of the night, ‘*entrer en pétrification stratégique*’ (p. 34) in a bid to fool his mother who complained of him wasting electricity. Moreover, Chamoiseau refers to his ‘soif’ to continue reading to get to the end of the story (*EPD*, p. 35), suggesting – as Confiant does – that reading is a strong physical desire.

The above examples imply that both authors saw reading as something that set them apart from others, that had to be kept secret and the need for which was equated by both authors to hunger, or thirst. Both seem to have been insatiable in their desire to read. Yet this ardent desire to read also had a damaging effect on Chamoiseau:

Et ces forces s'étaient imposées à moi avec l'autorité impérieuse de leur monde qui effaçait le mien. Elles m'avaient décuplé de vies mais en dehors de moi-même. Elles m'avaient annihilé en m'amplifiant [...] Ces livres en moi ne s'étaient pas réveillés; ils m'avaient écrasé. (*EPD*, p. 44)

This quotation clarifies Chamoiseau's opening lines in *Ecrire*, as he returns to the devastating, crushing force of this other, non-Antillean literature. It also explains the notion of *extériorité* outlined in *Eloge*, where the authors believe Antilleans perceive the world only through the eyes of the Other. There is an overwhelming sense of loss of self, emphasised in the use of ‘annihilé’ and ‘écrasé’, implying that the ‘real’ Chamoiseau is buried deep under these layers of dominant words from another culture. Yet the contradictory image of the worlds accessed by

Chamoiseau through books as forces that annihilate him 'en [l']amplifiant', brings out the ambivalent aspect of his dilemma: the journey into these books leave Chamoiseau empty, incapable of expressing himself yet they nevertheless bring him great pleasure. This ambivalence leads, inevitably perhaps to a strong feeling of frustration, of impotency. It is undoubtedly this aspect of reading that leaves the authors feeling silenced and all the more emasculated.

This feeling of silencing and suffocation is, as Moudileno tells us, not unique to the creolist authors: 'L'image de l'étouffement n'est pas nouvelle dans la littérature écrite antillaise' (Moudileno, p. 97). Moreover, she continues, 'elle est même à son origine' (*Ibid.*, p. 97). In order to combat this sense of impotency, the creolist authors return to those origins through the very medium that threatens to suffocate them: writing. Orphaned, bastardised and crushed under the cultural domination of French, this return to origins is undoubtedly an attempt to legitimise themselves as authors.

Lettres créoles – Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature de 1635-1975 is the only book-length text written solely by Chamoiseau and Confiant together. As the creolist authors' joint project, *Lettres créoles* is a key text to examine as the authors outline what they consider to be the function of the writer in the Antilles and so the entire narrative is in a sense a realisation of their theory. The text traces the emergence of Creole writing over the centuries, an emergence that is seen by the creolist authors as not far from miraculous given the near silencing that it has endured for so long. Their choice of the word

‘tracée’ with its different, significant meanings seems deliberate. On one level, as Chamoiseau and Confiant explain in *Lettres créoles*, it refers to the little routes scattered around the hills and forests beyond the plantations that are set up in contrast to ‘des routes coloniales dont l’intention se projette tout droit, [ont] quelque utilité prédatrice’ (p. 13). However, on another level, ‘tracée’ also acts as a metaphor, signifying the tracing of letters with a pencil implying that the authors are simply bringing out clearly the silenced voices of their ancestors. The need to trace, with all the meanings such a word connotes, reinforces the impression that the authors want to uncover the various routes and roots of their literary past.

Part 2: Creating a Family – the Fertilisation of the *conteur*

One of the most striking aspects of *Lettres créoles* is the authors’ obvious desire to uncover the multiple aspects of the origins of the Creole literary voice. Three different ‘origins’ are outlined: the ‘roches écrites’ of the ‘Amerindian/Karib’; the written French version of life in the early colonies by the *Chroniqueurs* such as Du Tertre and Labat; and the oral *cri* from the slaving ship’s hold that is adopted, and adapted by the *conteur*. It is the latter origin upon which we will focus for the remainder of this chapter for the *cri* is considered by the creolist authors to be the beginnings of the Creole literary voice. They assert that the origins of this voice lie in the *cri* of a tormented slave, ‘d’un Africain quelconque’ (*LC*, p. 39). The *cri* is his only means of expressing the intensity of the isolation, suggesting that it cannot be described in any other way. For the creolist author, it is a symbol of the

first resistance to the silencing of the slaves, and so constitutes their first revolt and the first seed of Antillean literature:

Le cri, le cri original, surgi des cales du bateau négrier à la vibration duquel vient s'enraciner notre littérature. (*LC*, p. 170)

The repetition of the word and its italics makes it clear that this 'cri' is much more than a shout that comes from the hold but is instead symbolic of a collective rejection of the conditions in which the slaves were held. Moreover, this 'cri' is a sound that encompasses the plurality of the slaves' origins: 'Dans la cale, il y a plusieurs langues africaines, plusieurs dieux, plusieurs conceptions du monde' (*LC*, p. 39). Above all, the word 'le cri' makes it clear that the authors believe their literature began with a voice, a sound – further distancing it from the writing of the colonisers and connecting it much more closely with the orality of the Creole language. The creolist authors believe that such a 'vibration' therefore forms the metaphorical germination of their literature.

Of the three 'tracées littéraires' identified in *Lettres créoles*, the *conteur* is the one most closely linked to the authors who describe him as the father, the 'Papa de la tracée littéraire dedans l'habitation' (*LC*, p. 43) and referred to by Chancé as their 'père symbolique' (p. 68). Unlike Walcott, the authors have not accepted themselves as fatherless but want to bestow their 'filial love' upon an idealised, exemplary father. Of course, as Moudileno and Chancé both demonstrate, it is almost impossible for the creolist authors to be the direct descendants of the *conteur* because of the way in which the written word has

distanced him from them: 'il [l'écrivain antillais] sait qu'il n'appartient plus à l'oraliture mais à la littérature' (*L'Auteur en souffrance*, p. 68). Perhaps because of an awareness of this impossibility, as well as a tribute to the *conteur*'s duty to protect their words, 'se faire oublier au profit de leurs paroles' (*LC*, p. 79), neither Chamoiseau nor Confiant gives the figure of the *conteur* a significant role in their fiction. Although Chamoiseau's *Solibo Magnifique* is named after a *conteur* in the novel of the same name, his death occurs at the beginning of the narrative and so the *conteur* does not actually feature in the text. Instead, his symbolic death – he chokes to death on a 'parole' – entails an absurd murder enquiry that ultimately sets up the fundamental differences between Western logic and Antillean reality. Rather than use the *conteur* as a character in their fiction, the Creolist authors use his technique. Chamoiseau tells us in the above-mentioned essay of how he goes out to find the forgotten *conteurs* who are still alive and interviews them, 'Et je les écoute moins pour entendre ce qu'ils disent que pour savoir *comment* et pour *quels effets* ils le disent' ('*Que faire de la parole?*', p. 156). His emphasis on the way in which the *conteurs* speak and the effects this may have, suggests that he believes the *conteur* can provide contemporary Antillean authors with a model for their writing. This is the only way in which they can make their writing Antillean – by connecting it to their 'Papa'. However, despite the anxiety about betraying the *conteur*, Confiant and Chamoiseau are extremely prolific when it comes to writing,¹⁶⁰ and, as Moudileno points out, the fear of betraying their ideal father figure by the process of writing is not always in

¹⁶⁰ Since the mid-80s, and especially in the last 10 years, Confiant has published a novel more or less annually.

evidence in their fictional works. For example, in her analysis of the writer figure in Chamoiseau's *Solibo Magnifique* – the *marqueur de paroles* Oiseau de Cham – Moudileno notes somewhat wryly that, 'si Chamoiseau démontre qu'il maîtrise à merveille et l'histoire et l'art du conteur, il n'en retient pas, dans sa propre écriture en tout cas, le principe d'effacement, ou d'humilité stratégique' (Moudileno, p. 111).

The assertion of the writer in the creolist authors' works suggests that the figure of the storyteller has not been completely 'castrated', as Arnold states, but can instead be considered as a fertilising force. Indeed, in an article that engages directly with Arnold's criticisms, Milne nuances Arnold's arguments. For Milne, drawing on analysis of Chamoiseau's *Contes Créoles* where the *conteur* is described as a virile figure, narrating *contes* is a way for the *conteur* to reclaim his masculinity, and respond to his castration (Milne, 'Sex, Gender and the Right to Write', p. 66). Therefore, Milne argues, the *conteur* does not necessarily symbolise the writer's emasculation but can be read in a positive way:

Rather than an emblem of impotence, then, the *Conteur* can be read as an icon of potent masculinity, a proper father figure endowed with generative powers who survives, not by subjugating women as the ordinary slaves do, but by secretly retaining his reproductive potential and sublimating it into literary creativity. (Milne [2001], p. 67)

The image of the *conteur* as an 'icon of potent masculinity' suggests that far from being 'castrated' he is actually virile and is able to assert his manliness

through his storytelling powers. In so doing, the frustration that leads the Antillean male to inflict sexual violence on the Antillean female is somehow transformed into a positive, fertilising force. Milne's assertion of the *conteur* as metaphorically fertile explains further why the creolist authors are keen to declare him as their father. However, Confiant and Chamoiseau are not actual descendents of the *conteur*: rather they create an idealised ancestor called a *conteur* whose traits they of course inherit. The authors' invention of an ideal father points to the teleological nature of their writing, identified by Gallagher. As this 'father' is post-engineered, the authors are actually establishing what kind of father the *conteur* is. Firstly, it enables them to turn away from the brutal, sterile violence of the male ancestor. Secondly, he provides the authors with a positive father figure, a genitor from whom they can establish their own literary genealogy.

However the only way, according to Chancé, for the Antillean writer to be able to fertilise the seed that comes from the *conteur* is through 'l'insémination artificielle' (*L'Auteur en souffrance*, p. 69) of his Creole word into written French. So, although the creolist authors can draw on the reproductive powers of their ideal father, they cannot do so naturally. The writing that emerges from this artificial process is represented, according to Chancé, 'comme un artisanat, mais [qui] exprime également l'embarras de ces fils, dont le père est quelque peu masqué, pour devenir pères eux-mêmes et engendrer une littérature (*L'Auteur en souffrance*, p. 69). Part of the desire to trace the father and draw on his virility stems from the authors' need to legitimise their literary genealogy and create their

own (masculine) literary identity. Moreover, as Milne indicates, the *conteur* represents a non-confrontational, non-violent genitor and so connects their past to the future in a way that does not elide colonisation (for the *conteur* was born on the plantation, as *Lettres créoles* makes clear) but that is nevertheless not sterilising, because the Creole language and culture is created. The potentially fertilising aspect of the *conteur* is specifically defined by Chamoiseau and Confiant as ‘plus exactement propogateur d’une lecture collective du monde’ (p. 73). This impression is reinforced with the image of ‘la matrice des habitations’ (p. 52) in which this fertilisation occurs, one that is also ‘un espace créole quasiment amniotique’ (p. 64) and the place of ‘une gestation’ (p.66)

The literary voice that begins as a *cri* in the slaveship, is inherited by the *conteur* on the plantation, has now been integrated into the writing of the creolist authors who have ‘inseminated’ their written language with the orality of their Creole ancestors. The literary voice that emerges from this slave ship is described in terms of a ‘birth’ that leads to ‘la naissance du conteur créole’ (p. 72) in the ‘liberté nocturne’ (p. 72) of the plantation. The image of a birth is reinforced by the darkness, like that of the womb, which underlines the sense of a new ‘creation’. In *Lettres créoles* then, two different births are outlined: first, ‘la naissance d’une langue’ (p. 66) in the plantations; secondly, the eventual ‘birth’ of the Creole voice.

In their own roles as Creole authors, Confiant and Chamoiseau are keen to assert the *conteur* as the genitor of their literary lineage. Nevertheless, Chancé’s

continual use of the terms 'père' and 'fils' with reference to the theoretical works of the creolist authors draws attention to the absence of the 'mother' or 'daughter'. Instead, this new literary voice appears to exclude almost completely the female (mother-daughter) voice. Indeed, if we look more closely at the different authors of various 'tracées' identified by the creolist authors in *Lettres créoles* – the 'graveur de pierres', the 'chroniqueur' and the 'conteur' as well as the literary figures whose work they examine – almost all are masculine figures.¹⁶¹ Even those who are considered by the creolist authors to be distant ancestors such as '[l]'héritier du cri [...] le Nègre marron', (LC, p. 43) are masculine. In *Lettres créoles*, we see that the authors do indeed seem to be creating an essentially masculine lineage, in which the female (the mother) is being eclipsed again, even at a metaphorical level. In this text, such a 'silencing' of the feminine voice actually almost writes women out of the picture for there is no mention of the 'mother' of this 'tracée littéraire'.

Chancé refers to the 'birth' of the literature produced by the creolist authors as a 'naissance assistée' (*L'Auteur en souffrance*, p. 69) because of the way in which the oral Creole word is 'artificially inseminated' (ibid.) into the written French one. However, I would argue that it is a birth that is also 'assistée' because of the absence of a mother. The female is excluded in two ways: firstly, in the completely masculine voice of the *conteur*; and secondly in the marked

¹⁶¹ Out of all the authors studied, very few women appear: the first author of Chinese origin, Marie-Therese Julien Lung-Fu is mentioned (p. 62) as is Maryse Condé (p. 204) and Simone Schwarz-Bart (p. 246-250). Arnold comments on this absence and continues, '[t]he exclusion of women from the Creole tradition becomes all the more remarkable when one considers that the authors of *Lettres créoles* have gone to some lengths to justify that obscurity, that alternately mumbled and screamed delivery of Creole language' (Arnold, p. 30), suggesting that such an omission is deliberate on the authors' behalf.

absence of a mother in *Lettres créoles*, the text that is meant to outline the literary genealogy of the creolist authors.

According to the feminist critic Trinh T. Minh-ha, the transmission of stories (i.e. literature) from one generation to the next is traditionally female. She informs us that in most oral cultures, ‘the world’s earliest memories [...] were the memories of women [...] Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and transmission’.¹⁶² However, the creolist authors transfer this oral role to the father, implying that it is a masculine responsibility. Arnold identifies the traditional role of women as the keepers of oral history in the Antilles specifically and comments on their absence in the work of the creolist authors:

None of these female figures of cultural transmission find their way into the history of *oraliture* that Chamoiseau and Confiant have constructed. Their place is occupied exclusively by the masculine figure of the *conteur*, who thus becomes the gendered ancestor of all Creole culture. (Arnold, p. 30)

It seems that the only way the male author feels he can secure his position (in the past and in the future) is by creating his own literary voice, to the exclusion of the female. Where the ‘mother’ does appear in *Lettres créoles*, she appears as a country: either a distant ‘relative’ who provides the very first physical – as opposed to literary – origins (Africa) or as the oppressive ‘mère patrie’, responsible for the ongoing domination of Creole culture in the Antilles. It is true

¹⁶² Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Women, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 121.

that while both of these mothers are mentioned in *Lettres créoles* – ‘L’Afrique mère’ (LC, p. 47) and ‘la Mère patrie’ (LC, p. 133), both are rejected as inaccurate representations of true parenthood. Moreover, the authors imply that this latter mother has made her daughter, Martinique, an obedient embodiment of French values, asking rhetorically, ‘[l]a Martinique n’est-elle pas la fille aînée de la France?’ (p. 152), dismissing ‘daughter’ in the same way as the ‘mother’. Meanwhile, the ‘papa’ has the role of nurturing the future generations of Antilleans and ensuring that the memories of their ancestors never die, described as a ‘[r]éceptacle, relais, transmetteur’ (p. 73). It appears that in order to assert the hitherto silenced Creole voice, which is usually seen as their “mother” tongue, the creolist authors have created a “father” tongue.

The use of the word ‘papa’ to describe the *conteur* as opposed to the more adult term ‘père’ reinforces the sense of an intimate link between the father and son. Indeed, it is not only the ‘tracée littéraire’ that is passed from Creole father to son, according to the creolist authors, but every aspect of Creole life, for example: ‘Les esclaves [...] transmettront à leur fils une culture créole de résistance’ (LC, p. 47). This suggests that it is specifically the Creole culture that is passed from one generation of men to another, which establishes an exclusively male literary lineage.

The powerful impact of this masculine genealogy is made clear in Chamoiseau’s *Ecrire* in his encounter with a prisoner in metropolitan France. This story could be taken as an allegorical (hi)story of the Antilles as a whole.

The prisoner, incarcerated by the metropolitan French authorities and festering in bitterness and anger is 'rescued' in a sense by Chamoiseau, who recognises the broken state of the prisoner, worn down by years of violence and (self-) destruction. Chamoiseau lends him Aimé Césaire's *Cahier* and Edouard Glissant's *Malemort*. Stimulated by these works, and others, the prisoner is jolted from his bitterness and is moved to write himself. He achieves freedom by re-writing his own version of events. This episode could also be seen as a *mise en abyme* of Chamoiseau's account of his own development as he emerges from the 'domination silencieuse'. The release of reading novels set in Martinique that are concerned with issues of identity and slavery, and that are written in the plural languages of the prisoner's native land lead to a transformation that makes the violence a creative rather than a destructive process. Throughout *Ecrire en pays dominé*, the process of writing as a metaphorical fertilisation is described explicitly. Although Chamoiseau begins to write in French, he finds that 'la langue française [...] devenait avorteuse' (p. 81). Nevertheless as he gradually discovers other writings beyond the French canon – Césaire, Glissant, Joyce, the Koran and so forth – they all merge and seem to 'impregnate' him. (p. 176). The effect of these readings is explicitly described in terms of a pregnancy by Chamoiseau as his previously sterility is replaced by '[c]ette petite vie inquiète qui clignotait en moi' (p. 233). Chamoiseau – the writer – has metaphorically become a mother, with the book inside him ready to appear in the world. The desire to 'steal' or at the very least to appropriate the female womb is realised by Chamoiseau in this metaphor as he feels the first stirrings of a life within him.

Creativity therefore allows the indisputably masculine writer (beginning with the virility of the *conteur*) to perform the feminine biological function. This writer is not seen as androgynous but as male, even although he is able to reproduce without the female. Having avoided violence and elided slavery by writing in the wake and after the model of the *conteurs*, Chamoiseau now performs violence by eliding the female. The final part of this chapter will examine whether Confiant enacts a similar violence in his fictional work. It appears that, while the creolist authors establish a literary genealogy, fertilised by the virile, male *conteur*, the reproductive powers of the female are being denied. Trinh T Minh-ha explores the masculine resentment of female writers and the subsequent masculine attitude to the womb. Indeed, she argues that ‘by being creative, a female writer is ‘stealing’ a man’s creativity’ (Minh-ha, p. 28). Since the female characters in the creolist authors’ works are of course invented by them, Minh-ha’s comments cannot be directly applied to our analysis. Nevertheless, she raises an important point about the masculine reaction to the womb not least a sense of resentment that women can be both biologically *and* creatively fertile.

The authors’ apparent ambivalence towards maternal biological fertility suggests that Arnold’s accusation of the creolist authors’ machismo writing does indeed hold some truth. An analysis of the association between fertility and writing in two female characters – Adeline in Confiant’s *Morne Pichevin* and Marie-Sophie in Chamoiseau’s *Texaco* – will allow us to explore the justification for this accusation further.

Part 3: Natural versus Narrative Reproduction

Morne Pichevin follows the breakdown of the relationship between Adeline and Homère,¹⁶³ which seems to have been triggered by Adeline's affair with her French teacher, Monsieur Jean, through whom she accesses the pleasure of writing. Marie-Sophie, the central character of Chamoiseau's *Texaco* who also finds deep gratification in the process of writing, gives her account of the construction (and many destructions) of the *quartier* Texaco. The act of writing brings a heightened awareness of language to each character. Adeline's 'histoire' is in part comprised of a Creole glossary that she is compiling as she learns French with Monsieur Jean. She discovers that writing a glossary seems to be the only way she can express herself: 'le français était certes grandiose mais, au plus profond de moi, je sentais qu'il y avait quelque douceur dans le créole' (*MP*, p. 29). These words imply a maternal aspect towards Creole that contrasts with the frightening school world of childhood. Despite this, she nevertheless experiences a sense of alienation when she realises that in fact Creole is the language with which she feels most comfortable. Her reasons for writing the glossary in Creole are explained to Monsieur Jean in a letter: 'Je n'ai rien à faire avec les mots des Blancs, ils sont impuissants à apaiser mes souffrances, ils sont trop froids, trop secs, ils ne sonnent pas comme les nôtres' (*MP*, pp. 67-68). The choice of words 'froids' and 'secs' emphasise this sense of the unfamiliar, suggesting that French is very distant to her and almost unnatural. The description of French words as

¹⁶³ This novel was originally published in Creole *Bitako-a* (1985), was translated by Jean-Pierre Arsaye in 1995 under the title of *Chimères d'En-Ville*, and it has now been translated by Confiant himself.

‘impuissants’ and incapable of comforting her is effective as we return to the notion that language – and by extension writing – is somehow sterilising.

However, the structure of the narrative means that Adelise’s voice is the only one to reach the reader directly – Monsieur Jean is left voiceless, which is somewhat ironic given that he is the one to have taught Adelise how to read and write. It almost appears as if he has ‘fertilised’ Adelise with knowledge and as a result is no longer needed; his contribution has been sufficient.

This impression is reinforced as Adelise falls pregnant with the child of Monsieur Jean, a fact that she does not want to reveal to him. In a letter she tells him about her unborn child: ‘Cet enfant clair qui a grandi dans mon ventre, je ne l’ai conçu avec personne et je ne comprends pas comment il a pu venir mettre ses entraves dans ma vie comme ça. Il n’est pas d’Homère en tout cas’ (*MP*, p. 67). Adelise’s refusal to identify the father of her child seems to represent a denial of her own biological fertility, and also suggests that the French Monsieur Jean cannot possibly be the father of her child, given her earlier words regarding the impotency of French and its inability to teach her profoundly. However, this denial of paternity is later contradicted when she tells the reader that the child is indeed Monsieur Jean’s, casually confirming this in the narrative, ‘lorsque j’ai porté l’enfant de Monsieur Jean, heureusement ma grossesse fut discrète’ (*MP*, p. 96). The ambivalence and secrecy surrounding the child creates an aura of mystery around Adelise’s pregnancy and this sense is heightened when the child is taken away from her at birth by a distant cousin who tells her she will not be able to cope. She greets this removal of her child with pragmatism, giving it as a

reason for her motherless state and the reason why ‘personne ne m’a encore appelée manman’ (*MP*, p. 98), a point to which I will return below.

Adelise’s pregnancy with the child of the French teacher is even more symbolic given that she has never been able to carry a child to full term with Homère. He appears desperate for a child and initially seems to hold Adelise responsible for the absence of a child, asking the reader: ‘Si après moult acrobaties vous n’avez pas conçu cet enfant que vous désiriez depuis une éternité, cela n’a vraiment pas été de votre faute...’ (*MP*, 141). Towards the end of the novel, however, Homère informs us that Adelise did fall pregnant often, and that each time she would excitedly prepare for the baby’s arrival:

Et puis quelques semaines avant l’accouchement, l’enfant “coulait” dans son ventre [...] à mesure-à-mesure, elle reprenait vie, ses yeux brillants d’une tristesse incommensurable. De cela nous ne parlions jamais’. (*MP*, p, 189)

Yet Adelise does not mention any of this in her own version of events, instead it is Homère who recounts the countless miscarriages she endures. It could be that the memories are too painful for her but this secrecy – and the fact that she seems in denial about her pregnancy with Monsieur Jean (which does come to full term) portrays a strong ambivalence about her own fertility. The implication here is that French is somehow fertilising in a way that Creole cannot be. This impression is heightened by Adelise’s ambiguous attitude to French: she feels unable to express herself fully in French and yet she is still seduced by a French teacher. Moreover,

she seems frustrated with Homère and his rustic ways and she (and others) put pressure on him to learn French, as Homère tells us: ‘Tous, petit à petit, m’ont façonné comme ils le désiraient et moi, comme une marionette, je me suis laissé faire. J’étais convaincu de devenir quelqu’un’ (MP. p. 182). The reader is forced to question Adélise’s motives: it seems strange that she should inflict such feelings of alienation on the man she is meant to love, feelings that she too has experienced when learning French. In this near-allegorical depiction, Confiant seems to be suggesting that Antilleans are completely seduced by French, despite their awareness that it can feel almost unnatural to them they still believe that it is the only way of ‘bettering’ themselves. Adélise’s pregnancy with the French teacher seems to support this notion. Confiant implies here that French is effortlessly powerful – i.e. potent – while Creole has to struggle to achieve potency and therefore to perpetuate itself, which presents a rather bleak outlook for Antillean society.

Yet if we look beyond this interpretation, Adélise’s Creole glossary offers a glimmer of hope, suggesting that although the process of learning to read and write is a painful and ultimately dissatisfying one, because it is first done through French, it gives Antilleans the tools to express themselves. In *Texaco*, Marie-Sophie also learns to read and write in adulthood. Unlike Adélise’s reaction to the French dictionary, whose disappointment with French leads to her writing her own Creole glossary,¹⁶⁴ Marie-Sophie seems to take pleasure in learning new

¹⁶⁴ As part of increasing commitments to making the Creole language more official, Confiant has recently produced his own glossary in Creole: *Dictionnaire des néologismes créoles – Tome 1* (Guadeloupe, Petit-Bourg: Ibis Rouge, 2001).

French vocabulary from Ti-Cirique: 'excitant en moi ce goût des mots précis dont la maîtrise m'échappa à jamais' (*T*, p. 357). French is the medium through which Marie-Sophie accesses written language, but she also senses as she pours words into her *Cahiers* that she gradually loses her father: 'mes phrases appliquées semblaient des épitaphes' (*T*, p. 353). The sense of betrayal here recalls the ambivalence felt by the Creole writers towards their 'papa', the *conteur*.

Indeed, it is only when writing becomes Marie-Sophie's way of dealing with the pain of her existence that she fully understands what it means to be a writer. Following the death of Arcadius, she pours her despair into the *cahiers* in a mode of writing that she calls 'Ecrire-déchirée' (*T*, p. 394) that takes her 'au dernier bout d'un bord quelconque de soi' (*Ibid.*). Ti-Cirique informs her that this sort of desperate writing is in fact 'l'élan primal de l'écriture qui sort de toi comme une nécessité, avec laquelle tu te gourmes (solitaire à jamais) comme contre ta vie emmêlée à la mort dans l'indicible sacré. Et, ce drame-là, on ne fait pas métier' (*T*, p. 395). In this depiction of writing as an all-consuming process that takes the writer to her/his very limits, Chamoiseau suggests that writing can become a sort of out-of-body experience. And so, after such a difficult existence, Marie-Sophie seems to find in writing a way of confronting the past that, while painful, is a transcendental experience. What is significant, is that it is an experience that must be undergone alone, 'solitaire à jamais', because while Marie-Sophie is writing she seems to come to terms with her childlessness.

Arnold construes Marie-Sophie's childlessness to be further evidence of the creolists' masculinist writing. He argues: 'Marie-Sophie Laborieux's admirable traits are represented as masculine within a dialectic of masculinity/femininity [...] at work in contemporary French West Indian literature' (Arnold, p. 38). Yet Arnold's interpretation does not take into account the personal *female* agony that Marie-Sophie's childlessness causes her. Earlier in the novel, Marie-Sophie laments all the suffering women must endure as she describes the effect of the abortions on women:

Que de misères de femmes derrière les persienne closes... et même, jusqu'au jour d'aujourd'hui, que de solitudes rêches autour d'un sang qui coule avec un peu de vie. (*T*, p. 264)

These self-induced abortions are necessary because Marie-Sophie has no means to bring up a child. Nevertheless, the regret present in the rather poignant 'un peu de vie' indicates a sadness on her part for having to destroy these unborn children and one that, as the quotation makes clear, is an agony borne only by women.¹⁶⁵ An almost identical phrase, 'ce sang vivant qui coule' (p. 281), appears later in the text and conveys the ongoing sense of regret for such a loss of life. It is only much later, when she is desperate for a child with Nelta that Marie-Sophie realises her womb has been destroyed by these herbal abortions and 'avait perdu l'accès au grand mystère' (*T*, p. 297). Like Homère and Adélise, Nelta and Marie-Sophie are unable to have a child together. Marie-Sophie's realisation is

¹⁶⁵ This recalls the admiration felt by the creolist authors for the female slaves' sacrificial children examined in Chapter 2.

described by her as ‘cette horreur’ (p. 297), implying that while she may be a *femme-matador*, a ‘defeminised’ – to borrow Arnold’s word – character, her desire for a child is a powerful, instinctive, feminine one: ‘ce désir de négraille qui fait comme champignon sur un débris d’ovaires’ (*T*, p. 342) and one that remains: ‘[l]’inassouvi désir d’enfant’ (*T*, p. 392).

The female characters Adeline and Marie-Sophie are constructed by Confiant and Chamoiseau in similar ways. While both female characters write, and through this process begin to question, and even resist, their immediate situation, they remain childless. Therefore for both characters, writing transforms their lives. For Marie-Sophie writing actually heals her in a sense as it enables her to connect with her dead father (‘c’était retrouver mon Esternome’ [*T*, p. 352]) despite the pain it causes her. It is also a way for her to affirm her own identity, for example she writes the word ‘Texaco’ again and again. For Adeline, writing enables her to escape from the expectations of the community of Morne Pichevin where privacy seemed impossible – ‘J’aime les livres car ils sont des antres de silence’ (*MP*, p.161). By writing her glossary, Adeline is also able to voice and articulate her inner thoughts and her cultural position. She provides a definition for words such as ‘l’Homme: Créature déraisonnable et souvent irresponsable’ (*MP*, p. 80); ‘Neige: Beau mot abstrait’ (*MP*, p. 118) and so forth. This ability to express oneself can only be seen as an empowering experience. In their writing, both women make a connection with their past and can explain their ‘histoires’. Therefore, writing is seen as a means for women to remember the past and give

their own voice to it. Indeed, Milne comments that Chamoiseau's women do not write novels and instead:

[A]lmost all the women's texts in Chamoiseau's work are in some way based, however unreliably, on their memories of past events, and thus appear as forms of documentary reportage rather than as the imaginative, poetic (folk-)tales of the *Conteur* ('Sex, Gender and the Right to Write', p. 68).

This quotation could also apply to Confiant's work as, for example, in *Brin d'amour*, Lysiane writes her 'Calendrier d'une absence' which is indeed an account of her thoughts and a testimony of her life. Therefore, writing is seen as a means for women to remember the past and give their own voice to it. The female characters produce alternative world views but they do not produce fictional narrative. In other words, Milne argues that the female characters do not use their creative or imaginative powers to write but are instead keepers of memory. However, it could be argued that many of the male characters in the creolist authors' works also write in the way Milne describes, that is to say, they too produce 'témoignages'. This is because of the role of the writer as the fighter against 'l'oubli'. Writers such as Amédée in *Le Nègre et l'amiral*, or Chamoiseau's *marqueur* are often recording the events of their *quartier* and – as was examined in the Introduction – are not confident creative writers, as if the past weighs too heavily upon them. They too record the events of the past and yet do not find a resolution of it through the process of writing.

While Milne argues that the creolist writing often silences female characters and prioritises the masculine literary heritage, it seems that the characters' childlessness is equally important. With Adelise and Marie-Sophie, the emphasis each author places on the character's desire for a child suggests this desire is a very powerful and strong one. There is the implication that, for these two female characters, writing can be seen as some sort of substitute for the child which they both desire but cannot have – in their writing, they are able to find a release from suffering: Adelise writes down her inner thoughts, expresses her pain and so confronts it through this process; Marie-Sophie also pours her energy into the writing and experiences the process as a form of healing: for example she refers to the 'médicament-poème' (p. 399). The notion that writing can soothe and appease is important, underlining the positive role of writing. It appears that the female characters' biological fertility is denied them in order for them to achieve this sort of catharsis, or form of resolution of past tensions, while at the same time becoming 'fertile' through the production of written words. This process is fertile in the sense that they (re)produce the past – their lives, their history, their thoughts – and themselves arrive ultimately at some form of 'birth', or renaissance. The texts *Morne Pichevin* and *Texaco* make this link between Adelise's and Marie-Sophie's writing and their potential for fertility by juxtaposing their childlessness (a form of sterility) and their prolific outpourings in words. The authors thus imply that, while writing may be fulfilling, it is not generally fictional writing, and moreover, the female must choose *between* child and writing.

I would argue that the creolist authors' reluctance to give their female writer characters an imaginative voice, together with the emphasis on their biological sterility, is simply a continuation of the violence that we find represented at the level of plot throughout the creolist authors' writing. For example, the regular abortions and miscarriages suffered by both Adeline and Marie-Sophie are both features that recall slavery and the originary patterns of violence that structured Antillean society. The creolist authors thus emphasise the damaging, sterilising effects of the original violence and its structure through these female characters, who signify continuing dominance of the violence of the past. This notion is reinforced by the way in which both Adeline in *Morne Pichevin* and Marie-Sophie in *Texaco* are affected by the dominance of French, as seen in this chapter (pp. 270-273). It is of course significant that Adeline chooses to give up the French man's child, an action which is not necessarily related to her writing but seems to be connected to language, and of course the French language in particular. Instead, it seems to stem from an inability, or a lack of desire to be a mother to this child – she refers to her inability to imagine being called 'maman' (MP, p.98) – which makes it seem as though she is relating this rejection of the child to a French term. This can be read as further evidence of Confiant's rather pessimistic view of the Antillean condition in its current form. Just as the inability of Adeline and Homère to have children can be read as a lack of hope regarding the Antillean future, the rejection of Monsieur Jean's child implies that there is nevertheless a rejection of old French values and their dominating force. This portrayal suggests that Antilleans are locked in a suffocating, sterile

impasse, where the Creole self is still dominated by the French, but where neither the Creole nor the French self is able to create a clear identity for the future. The damaging colonial structure continues to stifle Antillean society.

In the conclusion to this chapter, then, it is important to identify whether the creolist authors' treatment of their female characters' fertility – and sterility – is indeed a form of violence resulting from the overwhelming emasculation referred to by Arnold and Milne, who both imply that the creolist authors' female writers are denied an imaginative voice at the expense of the male (authorial) one, as we have seen. These fictional representations of writing and fertility appear to indicate that the process of writing can, for female characters, be liberating, even a possible means of coming to terms with the past – despite the fact that this form of creation is represented as incompatible with female fertility. However, on the other hand, although female biological fertility is denied in the texts, it cannot be forgotten that male characters receive similar treatment in the works of the creolist authors: their virility and sexuality are not portrayed as straightforward, as is evident in the damaged human relationships analysed in Chapter 2; and the central male characters, including – significantly – the writers (Amédée; the narrator in *Eau de Café*; the *marqueur*) are noticeably childless. Therefore the originary patterns of violence impact upon male fertility as well as female fertility. Moreover, although the female characters' writing is often a form of 'témoignage' relating to the past, the male writing characters also do not always produce fictional narrative. The *conteur*, as the fertile, virile genitor of the lineage of Antillean literary men, has this ability but the *marqueur* and others also

often write 'témoignages', like the women. The final point to make here is that, unlike the *marqueur* and the other male writers, at least the female writer characters experience some form of catharsis through writing. For, unlike the male writer characters, associated with 'failure' and 'shame', the experiences of Adeline and Marie-Sophie imply that writing can indeed be a source of intense pleasure (as well as pain because of the memories of the past on which it relies) and is therefore a 'release' from the tension and built-up suffering. The cathartic experience of writing for the women writer characters indicates that the portrayal of female characters (and especially potentially maternal ones) is therefore perhaps more positive and more complex than suggested by Arnold and Milne.

To conclude, perhaps female characters do hold, if not the key to how the creolist (male) writer might resolve issues of Antillean past, then at least the symbolic expression of the deadly tensions of the other aspects of the Antillean condition. The female characters are full of fertile potential, but are also apt to lapse into sterility at any moment. Although they are indeed able to 'create' – both new life and narratives – this comes at a terrible price: the narratives of Adeline and Marie-Sophie are born out of pain and instead of children. And while these female characters are able perhaps to achieve some sort of cathartic resolution of past violence, the success of this process is always mitigated. In the works of the creolist authors, it can be said that the figure of the female – and the maternal female in particular – acts as a metaphor for the Antillean condition. Filled with the potential for creation, they nevertheless bear the marks of (male) violence at the hands of the authors themselves, in that they are denied the

possibility of truly fulfilling that potential, in the form of fictional narratives and of children. However, despite this negative representation, the female represents a hope (however tentative) of overcoming pain and violence through the cathartic experience of writing. That this possibility is symbolised by Chamoiseau and Confiant by the female, an 'Other' who, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is not only fascinating and admirable but is also terrifying and predatory, leaves an urgent question to be addressed in the conclusion to this thesis. We shall now examine whether this possibility of resolution of the violence of the past is shown to be available (even in partial or mitigated form) to the male writer.

Conclusion

In this conclusion to the thesis, I shall return to the central themes of violence, sterility and fertility that appear as prevalent themes in the writing of the creolist authors. Violence appears on several levels throughout the works of Chamoiseau and Confiant. The repeated representations of the colonial violence indicate how the past has constructed – and continues to structure – a pattern of violent behaviour that has profoundly damaged – and continues to damage all Antilleans. The authors suggest that this pattern of violence began with the destruction of the slave's very sense of identity in the slave ship and continues to affect Antilleans in their relationships to one another. Throughout the thesis, we have explored various aspects of this violence which manifests itself in the creolist authors' work as physical, psychological and above all as a symbolic one. In this Conclusion, we return to the question posed at the very beginning of the Introduction and examine the extent to which the creolist authors come to terms with the horrors of the past through the process of writing.

In their non-fictional works, *Lettres créoles*, *Eloge* and Chamoiseau's *Ecrire*, the creolist authors establish the male writer figure as guardian of the Creole past and mediator between that past and the present. The writer acts as a kind of authority whose voice has been allowed to fall into silence for centuries, but which is beginning to re-emerge. Most importantly, this writer figure is presented as the person who is able to bring together the many strands of the past as the quotation from *Lettres créoles* in the Introduction (see p. 22) demonstrates.

In response to the question of who will be able to 'reconcile' all the elements and strands of the past, the authors answer: 'Des écrivains, bien sûr/ Même tardifs ils sont là...' (LC, p. 229). The creolist writers are there to piece together the broken stories of the past. This role for the writer turns him (and of course, we have identified the importance of gender here) into a kind of guardian of the past who will not allow this past to be forgotten. Indeed the role of the writer in Antillean society is more important than that of a mere guardian of the past, he also represents the successful resistance to the sterilising effects of colonisation and departmentalisation.

However, the fictional writing of the creolist authors does not represent this rather glorious role for the writer and, as was stated in the Introduction, the figure of the writer in the creolist authors' fictional work is instead associated with 'shame' and with 'failure' (p. 25). This study has demonstrated that these traits do indeed describe how writing is portrayed by Chamoiseau and Confiant but how it is above all pervaded with a sense of impotency, or even sterility. Thus, on the one hand writing can be a 'fertilising' means of resistance to the past as texts such as *Lettres creoles* outline (see Chapter 5, p. 262). And yet – on the other hand – the writers in the creolist authors' fictional work are struck by a strong sense of their own impotency. For example, both of Confiant's male writer characters, Amédée in *Le Nègre et l'amiral* or the narrator in *Eau de Café* appeared overwhelmed by their own futility. In his penultimate extract from 'Mémoires de Céans et d'Ailleurs', Amédée tells us:

En relisant mes feuilles de papier tiquetées de caca-bougie et le gribouillis, déchiffrable par moi seul, de mes parchemins en feuilles de bananier sèches que j'empile tel un trésor sur une étagère, je comprends l'ampleur de mon échec. (*NA*, p. 347)

It seems as though Amédée has realised the pointlessness of his own writing, which he alone can decipher and so will never reach the people for whom it was intended. Amédée's words are written and reach no-one, unlike the universal appeal and power of the *conteur*'s words. Amédée is powerless therefore to touch Antilleans and to activate any form of resistance to the surrounding violence. Amédée's immense feelings of frustration with his writing is symbolised in his inability to make his beloved Philomène orgasm (*NA*, p. 184). In his writing and in his sexual life, he seems to be rendered impotent, a contrast to the *conteur* who, as we have seen, is sexually potent (in sublimated terms, see p. 260). Similarly, the narrator in *Eau de Café* is also made aware of his own impotence and his inability to achieve what he wanted to do: discover the truth about Antilia and her story (although in *Eau de Café*, the failure of the narrator's writing seems to be less of his own making than is the case with Amédée). The narrator is treated with great suspicion and even contempt by the other villagers, his room is ransacked and in a final confrontation with Eau de Café, he accuses her of deliberately sabotaging his project to which she responds by begging him:

Ne viens pas ressasser ces diableries qui ne peuvent que me porter préjudice à nouveau. Ce que l'on ignore est plus grand que soi...oublie! Oublie, je t'en supplie. (*EdC*, p. 327)

The narrator's desire to write the truth fails because of the collective desire to forget the past, and any unsettling or troubling events. The significance of this refusal to acknowledge the past is clear. Confiant is using the narrator's frustration to highlight the collective Antillean denial of the past. The writer is thus established as a lone figure, whose words have little potency or effect.

Neither of these male writer characters corresponds at all to the hero figure identified in *Eloge* and *Lettres créoles* but are instead slightly failed, disillusioned characters and both are linked, in this, to the notion of sterility by the play on the metaphors in the texts. Ironically, then, although both of these male writer figures are fertile in the sense that they produce words – and often prolifically – each one is rendered impotent by the violence of the past, which he seems unable to comprehend fully through the process of writing; his feelings of failure and of disillusionment follow from this failure. This, of course, makes him unable to be the heroic guardian of memories depicted in *Eloge* and in *Lettres créoles*. We can conclude that, in Confiant's fictional writing, it appears that the process of writing does not enable the male writer to confront the past and to overcome – or even come to terms with – the violence of the past.

Chamoiseau's *marqueur* is more complex and ambiguous than those depicted in Confiant's novels because he often acts as a form of narrator,¹⁶⁶ such as the character Oiseau de Cham in *Solibo Magnifique*, or the 'urbaniste' in *Texaco*, or the *marqueur de paroles* (whose role was examined in the Introduction) and who mediates the spoken Creole word of the central characters

¹⁶⁶ There are other male writers in Chamoiseau's works, such as Ti-Cirique in *Texaco* but their roles are too marginal to be considered important in this context.

– Balthazar; Solibo and so forth – into the written French narrative. In each case, the *marqueur* appears as a kind of witness to events rather than being actively involved in the action. This makes him seem more like a passive observer rather than an important warrior, as one might imagine from the language used to describe the writer in Chamoiseau's non-fictional writings such as *Ecrire*. As if to undermine the role of the male writer further, the *marqueur* – like Confiant's male writer characters – is often struck by a sense of inadequacy, of his inability to convey to the reader what is really happening.

It seems important here to refer to the sense of failure referred to by Chancé and identified in the Introduction (p. 25), which can now be modified to conclude that the fictional male writer is indeed struck with a feeling of shame and of failure but that this image clashes with that of the heroic male writer of the creolist authors' non-fictional writing. Indeed, this sense of shame seems to correlate to the alienation experienced by Confiant's characters and suggests that the male writer figures in the fictional works of both Chamoiseau and Confiant are struck by a sense of sterility. This impression is made explicit at the end of *Eau de Café*, as the narrator suddenly feels the urge to rid himself of all his writing in a way that makes it seem almost like an abortion:

M'assurant de n'être épié par personne, je jette mes cahiers ainsi que les lettres d'Antilia à Emilien Bérard dans un dalot où une eau nauséuse s'écoule avec paresse (*EdC*, p 380)

The papers are flushed away and although he rushes back to pick them up, the papers are now 'mouillés et boueux', as if signifying the futility of all his writing.

All the words will have been rendered illegible by the water, the fruit of his creation disappeared – just as Amédée's work is decipherable by him alone.

Chamoiseau's *marqueur* displays a similar frustration: at the end of *Texaco*, he gives his account of how the narrative was put together under the title and introduces it as 'l'angoisse honteuse du Marqueur de paroles qui tente d'écrire la vie' (*T*, p. 418). There are several words here that indicate the *marqueur*'s inadequacy, not least the statement that he will 'try' to write about life, suggesting that this is an almost impossible task. Moreover, the notion that this task induces a 'shameful agony' reinforces Chancé's argument that writing for Chamoiseau and Confiant is indeed associated with shame. Moreover, upon looking at Marie-Sophie, his 'informatrice', the *marqueur* feels 'faible, indigne de tout cela, inapte à transmettre un autant de richesses. Avec elle, sa mémoire s'en irait comme s'en était allé Solibo Magnifique, et je n'y pouvais rien, rien, rien, sinon la faire parler, ordonner ce qu'elle me débitait' (*T*, p. 425). Again, the words 'faible', 'indigne' and 'inapte' create a strong sense of the *marqueur*'s humility, to the extent that he feels he is not up to the task in hand, and is somehow too weak, powerless to prevent the inevitable loss of Marie-Sophie's life story. The impression of impotence is heightened by the triple repetition of 'rien', emphasising the loss of the past and the *marqueur*'s inability to capture and represent this past in its 'reality'. Such a feeling of inadequacy is intensified when Marie-Sophie dies:

Je me trouvais alors anéanti par le poids de l'exigence qui s'imposait à moi. Pauvre Marqueur de paroles...tu ne sais rien de ce qu'il faut savoir pour bâtir/conservé de cette cathédrale que la mort a brisée. (*T*, p. 425)

This image takes us back to the image of the colonised male examined in the first and second chapters; the man who is emasculated by the violence of the past is now left disempowered by the lasting weight of it. The representations of the writer figure in the creolist authors' fictional writing suggest that the *marqueurs* and the male writers remain trapped under the 'expérience stérile' of the past that is identified in *Eloge*. Instead, Chamoiseau in particular implies, writers can only come to terms with the violence of the past through a painful process of their own, one that is also violent and even confrontational. This violent clash with the past is embodied by the old slave's liberating yet deadly battle with the dog in *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse*, (a battle that was analysed in the second chapter [Chapter 1, pp. 63-69]); and is also evident in the suffering of the female writers: these 'writers' find freedom in battle, confrontation and even death. Perhaps it is because of the male writers' passive roles within the novels – they seem to be incubators of knowledge and capable of simply transmitting written words but their writing does not come from the inner self in the way experienced by Marie-Sophie; it is not the 'Ecrire-déchirée' (*T*, p. 395) to borrow the word used to describe the painful outpourings of Marie-Sophie; her 'écrire-desespoir' (p. 395). As we saw at the end of the last chapter, the female writers – Adélise, Lysiane, Marie-Sophie – are actors, not spectators. Whereas they encounter immense personal suffering in life, Marie-Sophie and Adélise find a release and

even liberation in their writing. The male writers, on the other hand, suffer greatly in their writing and they seem to live almost vicariously, through the lives of their characters.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Chamoiseau's *marqueur* does occasionally find hope from such a sterile situation. Initially, a feeling of impotence overwhelms the writer in Chamoiseau's *Ecrire en pays dominé*. In this text, the author tells us how Césaire's negritude writing had rendered him sterile. He tried to write but 'après l'écriture d'un roman sur la grève agricole, j'affrontai une amère stérilisation. La langue-négritude m'avait laissé en panne' (EPD, p. 81). This is a form of domination that is not 'silencieuse' 'furtive' nor 'brutale' but is one that the writer is unable to identify with and is too connected with the coloniser. Instead it is Glissant who enables him to overcome this 'sterilisation', and who enables him to produce and free his dominated imagination. Reading Glissant's *Malemort* in 'exil' in France, Chamoiseau is finally released from the sterilising effects of colonisation:

Un livre-hiéroglyphe endormi, proche et indéchiffrable, rayonnant
d'étrange manière jusqu'au fondoc de moi dans les imminences de son
éveil. (EPD, p. 84)

The neologism 'fondoc' implies that this book has touched a layer within him that is very deep and buried, previously untouched. The author is penetrated, and even fertilised, by the books. This impression is heightened by the word 'imminences', the etymology of which has the sense of containment, like a pregnancy. The image of the book being gradually awoken from a long slumber represents

Chamoiseau's own awakening by his literary father. We will return below to the significance of the father figure fertilising the younger male writer to enable him to 'give birth' to literature, but here it is important to draw attention to the fact that the oppressive forces of the past can be overcome and made fertile with the help of writing, guided by a fatherly figure.

The only other successful male writer figure in either of the creolist authors' fiction is the *marqueur* who appears at the end of *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse*. In a postscript, the *marqueur* explains how the discovery of a pile of bones at the foot of a volcanic rock led to his determination to write the imagined story of these bones. This *marqueur* can therefore be seen as a successful writer; one who touched the past quite literally through the old bones and this connection to the past, with all its imagined horrors leads him to the following conclusions:

J'étais victime d'une obsession, la plus épouvante et la plus familière, dont l'unique sortie s'effectue par l'Ecrire. Ecrire. Je sus ainsi qu'un jour j'écrirais une histoire, cette histoire, pétrie des grands silences de nos histoires mêlées, nos mémoires emmêlées. Celle d'un vieil homme esclave en course dans les Grands-bois; pas vers la liberté; vers l'immense témoignage de ses os. L'infinie renaissance de ses os dans une genèse nouvelle. (*EVHM*, p. 145)

The words 'victime' and 'obsession' suggest that the *marqueur* is in the grip of something damaging that can only be resolved by an outpouring of writing. Yet, it must be a writing about the past, a past that is mingled with the memories of

those ancestors who have been denied a voice in which to tell their own stories. The old slave's run towards freedom, even at the cost of his own life, seems to symbolise the idealised process of writing for Chamoiseau. He too is seeking a freedom and an acceptance, or even transcendence, of the past. This *marqueur* seems to be the only successful writer, the one who is not filled with a sense of futility or powerlessness but who, on the contrary, is convinced of the power of what he is doing. In this case, the past is not sterilising but fulfils quite the opposite role: it has motivated the *marqueur* to write. This is proof that the past – despite its brutality – can be fertilising and indeed that the violence of this past can be transformed into a positive form of energy, a point to which we return below.

In the Introduction, Benítez-Rojo was used as a starting point for our analysis of how the creolist authors could come to terms with the horrors of the past through literature. Benítez-Rojo's belief that art can sublimate violence marked out a hopeful beginning for our analysis. Although the fictional works of Chamoiseau and Confiant imply that writing is often painful and destructive, the non-fictional works of the creolist authors testify that the act of writing can indeed help them come to terms with violence because they are able to surmount the sterilising forces around them and produce a work of art. However, as is in evidence throughout the thesis though, this achievement occurs at the expense of the feminine – and in particular, at the expense of female biological fertility. The focus in the writing of the creolist authors of the violence upon the female body

suggests that the creolist authors themselves are implicated in the very cycle of violence they seem to identify through their work.

The explanation to this violence inflicted upon the female is contained in the image of the female as the one who gives birth, and is thus a symbol of beginnings. For, throughout the work of the creolist authors – be it non-fictional texts such as *Lettres créoles* or fictional ones such as *Eau de Café* or *Biblique* – it has become clear that Confiant and Chamoiseau are obsessed with origins. Despite their proclamations regarding plurality and rhizomatic identity, this obsession marks out a distinct unease with the impossibility of tracing Antillean origins. The colonial past has ensured that the beginnings of the Antillean people can only ever be imaginary. The violence of the past has destroyed any ‘real’ memory of those origins forever. By visiting pain upon female characters – the symbol of the deadly tensions in the Antilles – the creolist authors convey to the reader how birth and death are inextricably linked in the Antilles, and imply that new beginnings free from the violence of the past are in fact impossible in contemporary Antillean society. The authors thus perpetuate the violence of their ancestors and although they succeed in tracing their literary origins and marking out their literary forefathers, it is clear that the past itself remains trapped in the imagined violence of its origins. The violence against the female characters is thus a symbolic way one but no less disturbing as a result. It reveals the authors themselves to be perpetrators of the very violence they seem at pains to identify in their work. Their representations of violence indicate that – within the Antillean environment – human reproduction is always twisted and distorted, all

of which can be traced back to the pain of unknowable origins. The following description of Doris by Eau de Café encapsulates this pain:

La ligne de vie du nègre est imprévisible et de génération en génération, on assiste à d'incroyables bouleversades qui, pour être décryptées, doivent être reliées aux membranes des jours passés. Or, précisément, Doris n'a jamais eu, dans notre souvenance tout au moins, ni de père ni de mère ni de lieu de naissance. (*EdC*, p. 363)

In other words, Martinicans have no known origins and will never find the legitimate roots to which the fascination with – and fear of – female fertility alludes. This seemingly unconscious violence the authors perpetrate on their female characters emphasises the virulence of the violence – despite the creolist authors' awareness of the damaging effects of it, they are perpetuating that violence through their own writing. If the process of writing can be considered a means of coming to terms with the past, this apparent impossibility to escape violence suggests that it is an integral part of writing in the Antilles. In order to examine this point fully, it is important to explore the growing differences between the creolist authors' writing and also to examine whether violence can actually be a creative force, a positive trigger to their writing.

Emerging Differences

Through most of this thesis, the emphasis has been on the similarities between Chamoiseau and Confiant regarding important themes, notably those of violence and the role of the writer. However, in the later chapters of this study and in

particular in their representation of female characters in the sea and as writers, differences begin to emerge. Let us begin by examining what these differences tell us about each author's representation of violence. The first three chapters indicate that the authors represent both the physical and psychological effects of violence in a similar way. However, in the violent struggle that takes place at sea for the three female characters examined (Antilia, Lysiane and Kalamatia), it is only Chamoiseau who seems to portray a positive outcome. Whereas Antilia and Lysiane disappear into the sea never to be seen again, Kalamatia – with the help of Man L'Oubliée – vanquishes the evil Yvonne Cléoste. We concluded that this confrontation with violence is depicted as positive. This example, and the triumph of the slave in *L'Esclave vieil homme* suggests that Chamoiseau is closer to producing a vision of a future in which Antilleans might be reconciled with one another and even overcome the violence of the past than Confiant whose outlook seems less optimistic.

The sense of Chamoiseau's desire for a positive confrontation with the violence of the past is most obvious towards the end of Chamoiseau's recent novel, *Biblique* and is embodied in the character(s) of Polo Carcel, a character notable for his/her ambivalent sexual character.¹⁶⁷ However, there is also a powerful violence contained in Polo Carcel as a 'danseur de combat. Un danseur de danmyé' (BDG, p. 664). This form of sport-dance, the *marqueur* informs us, is 'une danse de guerre d'origine africaine, certainement composite, qui avait survécu aux effacements du bateau négrier' (BDG, p. 664). Like the Creole

¹⁶⁷ The implications of the mixed gender of this character are referred to in Chapter 4, pp. 223-224.

culture and language, it is composed of multiple elements and is an expression of resistance to the dominant culture – to the extent that it was forbidden on the plantations (p. 664). We learn that the dancers have been criticised for not fighting against the ‘békés’, or ‘gendarmes’, or against the ‘malédiction’ itself. In response to this criticism, les Polo Carcel explained that ‘le damnyé était en combat contre l’oubli’ (*BDG*, p. 667). The dancers are not concerned with seeking revenge for the brutalities of the past but instead want to make sure that the horrors of this past are never forgotten. Indeed, this physical dance appears to embody what Chamoiseau is trying to achieve in his writing. In the movements of the dancer, the violence becomes something more positive: ‘Il dansait, se formait en dansant, sans désir de victoire, sans intention de dominer, sans le souci de susciter une quelconque admiration’ (*BDG*, p. 674). It is significant that this combat, or dance, occurs ‘sans désir de victoire’, for it implies that this is now a dance, not a battle of power. Unlike Balthazar’s fight with the captain on the slave ship (examined in Chapter 1), there is no need for revenge, or to prove strength over the other. Instead, this form of dance seems free from violence, as if the energy channelled into the movements elevates the dancer beyond the anger, or need to dominate, which is usually present during a fight. It is precisely this image of a struggle that begins with violence but is then transformed into something more beautiful, more graceful and ultimately more powerful than any form of violence that suggests this is a metaphor for what Chamoiseau seems to be looking for through the process of writing. Like the old slave, Polo-Carcel is motivated by an energy ‘qu’il déchargeait soudain’, a form of violence that is so

powerful it seems to possess the body and indeed Polo-Carcel also dies in a fatal combat. The death of this character could be read in a pessimistic way: indicating that if this form of combat ends in death, such confrontation is pointless.

However, given the earlier words of the Polo Carcel, I would argue that instead this death reinforces the notion that, for Chamoiseau, the need to confront the violence is more vital than actually overcoming it – underlining the sense that the ‘victoire’ is not important. There is a recurring pattern in Chamoiseau’s novels of a violent struggle that occurs – the old slave and the dog; Kalamatia and the sea monster; Polo Carcel and his/her combattant – and that acts as a form of catharsis. Through these violent confrontations, Chamoiseau suggests that power struggles are futile. Instead, these struggles indicate the need to confront the past, however painful and brutal this process may be. It is the cathartic experience of these struggles that – to return to the metaphor of writing – provides an energy and an art form for the writer.

Confiant’s representation of violence is generally more concerned with strength and brutality. Although the *damier* figure appears in his novels (*Le Meurtre du Samedi Gloria*), there is not the same positive violence that comes from the battles. One potential positive warrior figure could be Romule Beausoleil in *Le Meurtre* who learns how to fight by drawing on the positive, powerful resources of the nature around him. However, he is murdered before he has the chance to prove himself and so becomes another powerless male victim, deprived of his strength and of his future. The only cathartic violence present in Confiant’s work is the natural violence of the volcanic eruption (examined in

Chapter 1, pp. 69-75), in which one senses a desire for complete apocalyptic destruction. Confiant's representation of violence consistently suggests that Antillean society is brutalised to the extent that the only way of resolving this violence is through total annihilation, as the destruction of Saint Pierre signifies in *Nuée ardente*.

It could be therefore be said that Confiant does not use the violence of the past in a constructive way. Chamoiseau, however, presents a positive aspect of violence where it can be used as a force that is channelled to produce a kind of energy that is enhancing rather than debilitating. This recent difference between the two creolist authors concerning the representation of violence suggests that Chamoiseau's project more positively envisages that the process of writing will eventually enable him to use the violence of the past in a more affirmative way. Confiant's fictional representations of violence, on the other hand, suggest that the past is far from being resolved. Moreover, despite their common theoretical ground, Chamoiseau and Confiant seem to be moving away from their shared vision of the role of violence, of the writer and even of literary creation. This divergence is also reflected in their more recent non-fictional writings. For example Confiant is becoming increasingly involved with the linguistic policies of Creole in the Antilles, but also in the creolophone world at large. His recently published *Dictionnaire des néologismes créoles* and texts produced for the Creole CAPES¹⁶⁸ indicate that he is moving towards a version of *créolité* that which is more focused on the Creole language and its promotion in his native island and

¹⁶⁸ *Dictionnaire des néologismes créoles – tome I* (Guadeloupe: Ibis Rouge, 2001). See also *Dictionnaire des titims et sirandanes* (Guadeloupe: Ibis Rouge, 1998) and *La Version créole: Collection Guide CAPES Créole* (Guadeloupe: Ibis Rouge, 2001).

thus away from a more open, multilingual identity. This form of monolingualism seems far removed from the promotion of multilingualism that is outlined in *Eloge*, and even from Confiant's own writing which is mainly written in French, albeit with a large number of creolisms.¹⁶⁹ Chamoiseau, on the other hand, is keen to emphasise the many authors from different backgrounds who have influenced him, as his text *Ecrire* demonstrates, and seems to be looking outwards away from the internal politics of his native island. Indeed, both his recent fictional and non-fictional writings hint at a belief in the importance of a multiple identity that is impossible to define. The plural nature of this identity corresponds to a Glissantian vision of 'tout-monde' in which fluidity is the desired form of identity. In her analysis of Glissant's work, Britton argues that this vision 'convey[s] the exhilaration of th[e] break-up of the old, singular system of domination and its replacement by a world view based on diversity and unpredicatability' (Britton, p. 179). The key ideas here are the notion of a 'world view', one that is not insular or closed and the importance of 'diversity' that is replacing the old categories of definition. This version of 'tout-monde' is visible in Chamoiseau's writing where a vast number of characters in *Biblique* who cannot be categorised into any one identity such as Polo Carcel, Sarah Anaïs-Alicia and so forth. The number of these indefinable characters suggests that this

¹⁶⁹ See for example Confiant's discussion on the subject in 'Questions pratiques d'écriture créole', in *Ecrire la «parole de la nuit»: la nouvelle littérature antillaise*, ed. Ralph Ludwig (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 171-180 or a more specific analysis in 'Creole in the French Caribbean Novel of the 1990s: From Reality to Myth?', in *Francophone Caribbean Today: Literature, Language, and Culture*, eds. Gertrud Aub-Buscher & Beverly Ormerod Noakes (Mona, Jamaica: The University of West Indies Press, 2003), pp. 82-97.

is the beginning of a new pattern for Chamoiseau in which any kind of boundary – gender or sex – is unclear. The freedom from any categorisation and a desire for ambivalence is a step beyond the fluidity of *créolité*, for it points to the very invalidity of pinpointing a single form of identity. Finally, we can conclude that both Chamoiseau and Confiant are redefining *créolité* in their own way, and that it too is therefore in flux, ebbing and flowing like the patterns of identity they outline in their work.

To the Future

The interdisciplinary and occasionally eclectic mix of theoretical perspectives brought to bear in this thesis is imposed partly by the very nature of the Caribbean and its literature, as identified by Benítez-Rojo and by Mary Gallagher who emphasise the ‘shifting’ nature of the archipelago and who consider the fluidity and flux of the region itself to contribute largely to the identity of the Antilles. These critics draw attention to the importance of the surrounding environment and emphasise its influence. Such an approach has the important advantage of allowing a systematic focus on the literary works themselves rather than on the elaboration of a rigid theoretical tool. Moreover, a theme like violence opens up a discussion that is ultimately broad and that sheds light on other themes, such as on gender, art and writing. It also successfully enables comparisons between writers. As a result, it seems clear that this methodology could be applied to other Antillean authors who have also published theoretical and fictional works yet who have often been the focus of a theoretical

approach which tends to overlook the importance of close textual analysis. Confined by the limitations of my thesis, I focused my approach on the Chamoiseau and Confiant, but another study could include other contemporary Antillean authors in the same comparison. Although there have been studies carried out on French Caribbean writing by women, these tend to focus, understandably, on the female authors alone. These studies – such as those by Sam Haigh and Nicki Hitchcott – cover similar thematic issues, and examine in particular the impact upon Francophone women.¹⁷⁰ However the wider geographical area covered in such studies obviously limits the amount of textual analysis and in-depth comparisons that can occur. Françoise Lionnet too raises important issues on questions surrounding gender in postcolonial situations but again, the broad scope of her study makes any specifically thematic – and Caribbean – focus impossible.¹⁷¹ It would therefore be illuminating to examine how female authors such as Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau represent violence, and its reproduction, compared to the creolist authors. This would complement the criticisms of the creolist authors' writing for its so-called machoism. It would be especially fruitful to explore these female authors' representations of sterility and fertility and to consider to what extent these metaphors are gender-specific. Of course, given that Condé and Pineau, for example, are Guadeloupean, there may be other, slight cultural differences that emerge.

¹⁷⁰ Sam Haigh, *Mapping a Tradition Francophone Women's Writing from Guadeloupe* (Leeds: Maney Publishing for the Modern Humanities Research Association, 2000); Nicki Hitchcott (ed.), *Gender and Francophone Writing* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 2001).

¹⁷¹ Françoise Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995).

Another future scope would be an analysis of the representation of violence in contemporary Antillean authors who are opposed to *créolité*, such as Daniel Maximin, or those authors who are the literary forefathers of Chamoiseau and Confiant such as Edouard Glissant. Again, this extension of focus would enable us to explore to what extent the early writings of *créolité* have indeed influenced – and continue to influence – fiction by the creolist authors, as well as probing further their ‘tracées littéraires’. It would also be interesting to take the theme of the ‘reproduction of violence’ and examine how it imposes itself as a pattern in the works of contemporary Antillean authors in more subtle and far-reaching ways. For example, it would be important to examine further the portrayal of the pattern of violence as it impacts on the Antillean environment itself, which some contemporary Antillean authors (such as Chamoiseau and Glissant) condemn as negative effect of globalisation. This phenomenon is considered by Chamoiseau and Glissant to be yet another extension of colonisation, and therefore another way in which the violence of past is reproduced in contemporary Antillean society.

The creolist authors may not ultimately be able to come to terms with the violence of their past through their writing, but their reproduction of that violence, in texts which both address and at points almost embody the theme, is still nevertheless an important – and enlightening – element in the post-colonial struggle to overcome the consequences of brutality, or, like les Polo Carcel, to produce beauty out of a situation of combat.

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